

GRADE SPAN AND ITS EFFECTS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Grade Span and its Effects

by

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Abstract

In the spring of 1998 the Avalon East School Board was reorganizing due to declining student enrolment and a surplus of student spaces. A task force was initiated to investigate and provide to the board a plan for this realignment.

A report on the desired grade configuration of the remaining schools was requested. A grade configuration committee was struck to investigate this topic and report to the programs committee its findings with appropriate recommendations. The researcher, as a participant/observer of this committee, provided an extensive literature review of the topic, designed a survey for distribution to representative stakeholders and provided an analysis of the results.

Neither the research nor the results of the survey substantiated one ideal grade configuration. Factors which impacted the recommendations of the committee included available finances, an imminent Atlantic provinces curriculum model, building conditions, administrative requirements, and personal preference.

A grade configuration of K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 was chosen as the most practical for the board given the existing situation. A policy outlining steps that the board could follow in reconfiguring schools in the future was developed by the researcher.

Acknowledgement

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The decision as to which grade levels should be grouped together to optimize student educational achievement is not a simple one. Everything, from the size of the student population to the size of the cafeteria, influences which grade span will exist. Changing from one grade configuration to another is many times a difficult process for educators, parents, students and the community. Acceptance of such change is rare especially when there is little evidence to support a single grade configuration. For educators and decision-makers it is crucial that they enter the realm of policy development to justify change. However, there is rarely total confidence in these decisions as they are often hazy, blurred and uncertain. As Cibulka (1992) says policy development assists "to capture what is or what ought to be" (p. 130). This leaves one to ponder the correctness of one decision over another.

Which age groupings are combined and for what reasons are as diverse and numerous as the different combinations that can be generated with the numbers that go from one to thirteen? Some of the factors that influence grade configuration are obvious and quantifiable, such as the need for different physical structures for six-year-olds versus eighteen-year-olds. This would entail considerations such as the appropriate placement of water fountains or the installation of specific types of lockers. Or

they may be as obscure and indeterminate issues such as how the activities and behaviors of eighteen year olds impact six year olds and vice versa.

Does one grade span offer an educational advantage? This is a highly subjective question given the dearth of research and empirical evidence on the subject. The Avalon East School Board established a committee to consider all the issues that may influence the reorganization of its schools. The researcher, as a participant/observer of the committee, provided information from a comprehensive review of the literature as well as developed and provided analysis of the results of an extensive survey instrument. Being a participant/observer allowed the researcher to partake in the discussions and follow the decision making process within the committee. Decreasing financial resources and declining enrolments were major overriding reasons necessitating this reorganization. It was within this milieu which the issue of grade configuration was investigated.

The specific purpose of this project, as undertaken by the author, was to develop a draft policy for the grade configuration of schools within the Avalon East School Board. In developing this proposed policy, an investigation was made of the effect, if any, that grade configuration has on such issues as academic achievement and social development. Academic achievement was determined by the success or perceived success that a student experienced in a particular grade configuration. Social

development encompassed selective components, which enable students to adapt socially to one particular grade configuration.

The decision as to which grade levels should be placed in schools and which age groups should be placed together in the same facility has never been satisfactorily determined. Some researchers have made more compelling arguments than others regarding the need to segregate various age groups and combine others. Some have suggested that there has not been sufficient empirical evidence to substantiate any of the claims. The issue has been clouded by an inability to determine what is actually being investigated and what the findings reveal. The advantages or disadvantages, perceived or real, to having certain grade level arrangements within a school remain unclear and dubious.

Context

The grade configuration of schools currently in the Avalon East School Board is varied. Presently there are sixteen different grade configurations in the eighty-two schools (Table 1). Within the province other configurations also exist. The configuration used depends on several factors including the community in which the school exists. The most favored grade configuration for the primary/elementary levels in the Avalon East School Board is K-6, which exists in twenty-six schools. There are eleven K-8 schools. The adolescent is primarily educated in six 7-9 schools and the senior high student in eight 9-12 and six 10-12 configured schools respectively.

Table 1

Grade Configurations of the Avalon East School Board in 1998

GRADE CONFIGURATION	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
K-3	2
K-4	3
K-6	26
K-5	3
K-8	11
K-9	3
K-12	1
4-6	1
6-8	1
5-8	3
6-9	2
7-9	6
7-12	5
9-12	8
10-12	6
special school	1

With the decline in student enrollment, reduction in teacher allocations, and looming school closures, school district personnel will need to develop policy to assist in making decisions regarding which schools will close and the grade arrangement of the remaining schools. While the proposed policy

may not determine one best grade configuration for the district's schools, it may provide a set of criteria that can help the school board in making decisions which will prove to be not only administratively feasible and economically prudent, but also educationally responsible. The redeployment of existing human and physical resources could have a sound pedagogical basis and result in enhanced educational opportunities for students.

In 1988, Cleveland County and Shelby City, two separate school districts, combined into a single school system to improve instructional offerings for their children. Similarly, the new Avalon East School Board was the result of a merger, but in this case six separate school boards combined. The issues facing this board are comparable to those which challenged the Cleveland County School Board in the mid 1980's. The board is proposing that several schools be closed because of the declining student enrollment in the 1998-99 school year. Speculation exists as to additional school closures in subsequent years as student population projections indicate further decline. Which schools close and which remain open will be based on several criteria ranging from the physical condition of an existing facility to making class sizes more viable, from the best utilization of existing personnel to acquiescing to the political influence of parents and the community. The issue of how these schools could be configured to better prepare a student for academic success

may or may not be the primary factor in determining school closures and reconfiguration.

A committee was initiated by the Avalon East School Board under the guidance of the Assistant Director for Programs and a school board trustee to investigate and report to the Programs Committee its findings so that it may make the appropriate recommendations. The terms of reference of the committee were as follows:

The committee shall:

1. Review the current research/information available on the pedagogy of grade configuration.
2. Gather/analyze input from stakeholders on the preferred grade configuration.
3. Investigate the impact that grade configuration has on social development and academic achievement.
4. Make recommendations to the Programs Committee regarding the preferred grade configuration for the district/or portions of the district.

Members of the committee, in addition to the two people listed earlier, included three parents, two principals, three teachers, five district program specialists and the associate assistant director of programs. It was felt that if research was to conclude that grade configuration is a prerequisite to improved academic achievement and social development then this information could be utilized as one element in determining which

schools should remain open and what the grade configuration should be of the remaining schools.

Sound pedagogical reasons for realignment decisions could be enough to buffer the public outcry from those who wish to maintain the status quo solely out of ethnocentric sentiment. Thus the decisions would have their grounding in research and less likely to be perceived purely as political ones. The objective of this project was to undertake a policy analysis of the impact of grade configuration and to investigate possible links between it and student achievement and social development. A draft policy document was prepared for the school board.

This draft policy attempted to identify those conditions, which are created by the various grade configurations and how these conditions impact upon the academic success and social development of students. This should assist in the development of guidelines, which the school board can use for decision making in creating future grade level arrangements in its facilities.

Need for Clarification

There are many diverse opinions as to what constitutes the best grade configuration for schools. While some configurations may be eliminated for reasons of cost, geography, or practicality, it is impossible to decide upon one configuration which meets the expectations of all the stakeholders. This presented an inherent paradox to be faced by the committee as

they attempted to decide the grade configuration of the schools under the board's jurisdiction. As White (1983a) says:

Policy analysis is a complex social process of creating and applying knowledge to public policy. Few policy choices are final, unambiguous, or fully articulated; and few policies are independent, self-contained, unquestioned, or consensually understood. Policy analysis, as a result, is turbulent and open-ended rather than neat and easy. Decisive studies are very much the exception than the rule. (p. 11)

The development of a draft policy on such a nebulous and blurred topic came to be a very uncertain and difficult task. The issues that were considered in developing the draft policy extended far beyond the initially established criteria of academic success and social development of the child. The concept of grade configuration has as its determinants a plethora of influences. Yet, as seen in many cases of decision making in education, the direction set is either brought about by stakeholders or representatives of the stakeholders, whose views are often subjective and myopic. The issue of what constitutes the optimum learning environment is sometimes forgotten. The primary stakeholders in this issue are the students, parents, teachers, administrators and school board.

Many factors were used in determining solutions to this problem. The costs associated with the reconfiguration of existing schools, the pedagogical implications, parochialism, how different grade configurations fit into the proposed reorganization of the schools of the board and the external/internal politics all influenced those final decisions.

White (1983b) places the situation in a realistic context when he says:

Policies, and public problems in general, are embedded in complex, dimly perceived institutional and historical contexts. Stakeholders are numerous, and their interests are obvious. Any given situation will have meanings to some that can hardly be imagined by others of different background, training, or social location. On such shoals, policy analysis regularly founders. Defining or formulating "the problem" itself presumes an intolerant view of any presenting situation. (p.44)

Need for Policy

Why develop a policy on this issue at all? If as the literature suggests there is conflicting evidence concerning grade configuration then perhaps a policy is worthless. Yet, if there is no method by which to weigh all the issues that influence how a school will be configured then essentially it is done in the absence of rationality. Education is too important a process in the lives of students and on the outcomes of society to leave entirely to chance or allow to be created haphazardly.

Feld, Berns, St. Thomas, Radov, Winsor, and Gaudreau (1980) settles this necessity question saying:

Closing schools, initiating renovations, revising curriculum, and other activities occurring without a coherent agreed upon set of policy objectives and strategies will not result in the provision of quality, cost effective education. An understanding of the interrelationship between the community and the schools, the role which the schools play in the life of the neighborhood, the influence of the community on the school, and the impact of such an educational policy change upon the students is essential in any educational policy study process. (p. 5)

The policy that the Avalon East School Board should follow in making decisions regarding the development and implementation of a grade configuration for its schools is meant as a guideline only. There is no one single grade configuration that has been adopted as meeting all the needs of the school system. But, there are some very crucial elements that should be considered before the decision is made to reconfigure the grade level arrangements within a school and a district.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grade Configuration K-12

Existing grade configurations range from single grade schools, of any age group, to the totally encompassing kindergarten to grade twelve school. Multi-graded to non-graded situations can also be found. The arguments for and against any particular configuration are varied, and often contradictory. While each level has been researched it is the intermediate or middle school which has been given most attention. This may be due to the changing nature of the adolescent and their unique needs, or the fact that most realignments on either end of the school system usually affects the middle school or junior high school directly. An understanding of all the configurations and what the literature states is vital to any decision regarding the altering of the number of grade levels in a school.

According to Hess (1978) the first system of education known was in 1818 when the first primary school was created in the United States. The Prussian system caused the change from the existing nine grades to thirteen grades and resulted in the 8-4 plan or K-8 and 9-12 schools. Eventually grades 7 and 8 were removed due to studies on child development thus creating K-6 schools.

Within the United States, the K-6 program caused a shift from inculcation of the skills approach in schooling to one of

educating the total child. The K-8 system still survived in many areas. Other grade arrangements such as the K-2, 3-5, provided economic and institutional advantages and because of the declining enrollments of the 1970's gained support. Since the 1960's there has been growth in the pre-K and more acceptance of K-2 and K-3 structures (K-6 is still the most popular while K-8 has a notable minority). K-8 is now mostly a rural phenomenon. The K-2 and K-3 configurations have grown at the expense of the K-6. Throughout the decades there have been numerous shifts in grade configurations (Table 2,3,4).

Table 2

Organizational Patterns 1938-1990 Based on National Percentages

GRADE COMBINATIONS	1938-1948	1948-60	1960-70	1982	
				OVER 3000	UNDER 3000
6-3-3	35	0	0	0	0
8-4	23	24	0	10	21
7-5	3	3	0	2	1
7-2-3	1	0	0	0	0
6-6	16	15	0	4	23
6-3-3	4	34	70	37	12
6-2-4	12	16	15	21	17
5-3-4	2	0	2	12	9
4-4-4	0	0	0	1	2
other	3	8	10	13	15

Table 3**Schools by Grade Span**

GRADE SPANS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	% OF TOTAL
K-3 and K-4	5043	06.3
K-5*	13 842	17.3
K-6*	20 774	26.0
K-8*	5394	06.8
4,5,or6 to 6,7or8**	7957	10.0
other unclassified elementary spans	6286	07.9
7-8 and 7-9***	4687	05.9
7-12	3513	04.4
8-12	481	00.6
9-12	10 015	12.5
10-12	1335	01.7
other spans ending with grade 12	112	00.1
other unclassified secondary spans	407	00.5

*may include pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or 1st grade;

labeled "middle school"; *labeled "junior high school"

Source: United States Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, "Common Core of Data" survey. (January, 1990).

Table 4

Shift in Grade Configuration of Junior High Schools and Middle Schools Between 1970-1985

Number of schools

GRADE SPANS	1970-71	1982-83	1984-85
5,6,7,8	722	944	1005
6,7,8	1622	3144	3820
7,8	2450	2550	2776
7,8,9	4711	3340	3172
other	850	1428	940
All 5-9	10 395	11 406	11 695

Hough (1991) said there has been a move since the 1970's to provide useful data on school practices that are effective. As he confirms it was the late nineteenth century that saw a 6-6 plan (6 years elementary and 6 years high school) to facilitate movement of students into the work force at an earlier age. During 1910-1920 the junior high school emerged for the purposes of retaining students in school, economizing instructional time, providing for individual differences and more guidance, initiating vocational educational programs, recognizing the nature of the adolescent, beginning subject matter

departmentalization, increasing students' education and creating socialization opportunities by providing physical education.

Hawkins, Chambers, Frechtling, and Frankel (1983) investigated the effect of elementary and middle school grade configuration on student achievement, parent and student satisfaction, program costs, and student attitude and self-concept. They found that no definite conclusions could be drawn due to (a) inconclusive data, (b) inconsistent findings, and (c) lack of relevant empirical studies.

They also found that most of the research, up to that point, had been based on "expert" opinion, meaning that many had their views and substantiated them on personal reflection only and not through research. Several configurations such as K-2, K-3, 3-6, 4-6 had no empirical data whatsoever.

A very strong statement was made by Barber (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983):

There does not appear to be any "best" grade organization. Grade organization is really a political issue, not an educational issue. It seems a board and superintendent would be best advised by [Hawkins] to understand that they are trying to make a political decision, not an educational decision. To try to add credibility to a political decision by finding a best way predicated upon research would be a misuse of both politics and research. (p. 8)

Johnson (1982) concludes his recommendations on how to successfully implement a new grade configuration for a school by saying:

A district's choice of 6-3-3, 8-4, 4-4-4 is not as important as what happens across the hyphens. Any organizational plan can be made to work: but good articulation between school

levels as well as careful planning of programs within each school level are required to assure needed continuity of learning activities. (p. 113)

Hough (1989) supports this when he says that "any number of grade organization patterns have proven successful. To say one configuration is better than another is more a reflection of community than of evaluations drawn from empirical data" (p. 10). Wiles and Thomason (1974) said their findings indicated little evidence by which to evaluate middle school education. The absence of evidence is attributed to poor research procedures, a narrow and biased focus and a failure to clearly define the subject of the study. Caliste (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) compared 12th grade students who had been educated in a K-8 pattern with students in a K-3, 4-6 plan in an effort to determine the effect of school organizational patterns on learning and school adjustment. His findings indicated that:

1. achievement did not differ,
2. few differences were found with students' perception of school experiences,
3. no meaningful differences were found between students in stability of socioeconomic aspiration level,
4. no inhibitory effects of organization patterns in participation in extracurricular activities was found,
5. stability of performance within socioeconomic status classification was found. (p. 26)

Austin (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) compared a (5-3-4) school which would be a K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 school with a traditional (6-3-3) or K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 school. Again, the findings were indecisive. He found that there were:

1. no conclusive differences between the groups in academic achievement as measured in grade 7,

2. no significant differences in attendance, dropout rate, and co-curricular participation before grade 10,
3. parents questionnaire indicated the 5-3-4 program was superior in all categories. (p. 84)

However, a more recent piece of research completed by Franklin and Glascock (1996) holds some promise that grade configuration is an important element in determining quality education. They studied schools and presented empirical findings on the relationship between a school's grade structure and student achievement and persistence in grades six through twelve. Some conclusions they reached based on their findings were:

1. students from grade 6 and 7 attending combination and elementary schools performed better academically than those in middle schools or secondary schools.
2. student persistence (attendance, suspensions, expulsions and dropouts) were more positive for elementary and combination schools than middle schools or secondary schools. (p. 21)

They go on to say:

Grade segregated schools may be sacrificing a certain segment of the student population for purely administrative reasons (saving money or space) which is diametrically opposed to the goals of education. Specifically, the combination school appears to have positive effects on the academic performance of students in grades six and seven, whereas middle and secondary schools have a detrimental effect on the same grade levels. (p. 22)

Popoff (1987) suggests that the primary (K-3) setting meets the unique needs of the primary aged child since this school setting is more specific. Using her personal experience as a primary teacher and a principal, she states that while there may be some advantages to having the primary/elementary grade configuration, overall, the primary child may be disadvantaged by

this arrangement. This student has unique needs and requires special attention. She believes that a primary school arrangement allows for the direct addressing of primary concerns and that the primary school is a good bridge between the home and the larger school system.

Raze (1985) also suggested that the K-2 and 3-5 configuration is best. She said that it is often implemented in response to declining enrollments. It affords better concentration on the educational and psychological needs of the children in two age groups. Other positives included expenditure reductions, less discipline problems, improved student attitudes and student interactions. It emphasized the need for clear articulation between grade levels. However, there were also negatives attached to such a grade configuration. These included a need for bussing, some would have to walk further to school, and breaking up younger and older siblings which provided a sense of security for the younger ones.

The senior high school has experienced considerable reorganization in the past few decades. There has been a general acceptance that the student at this level is prepared to experience a substantial degree of autonomy and departmentalization. Pearce, Copa, Pease, and Beck (1992) suggest that the issue for this level of learning is not a distinct reconfiguration but rather "organizing learners that meet student needs for connectedness and improved interpersonal

relationships can be divided into two categories: providing a small school within a whole school for some students and dividing the whole school into smaller schools for all students" (p. 1).

The concept of a house plan incorporating students from all grade levels in the senior high plus special individualization for those that require it are elaborated upon in this article. The issue is not one of reconfiguration for the senior high as much as accommodating the needs for students within the existing framework.

Some of the reorganizations and realignments may be pedagogically motivated but not all reasons given for consolidation have educational value. Cleveland County and Shelby City School's consolidation (1988) is an example of this. The new board reorganized its school system into K-5, 6-8, 9-12 from a pre-merger K-6, 7-9, 10-12 system. The reasons for the reorganization were:

1. best configuration to allow for the utilization of the middle school,
2. permits grade nine to attend an organized senior high school,
3. elimination of the operating cost of replacing some elementary schools due to reorganization,
4. better utilization of existing school capacity particularly at the elementary level,
5. elementary school of more acceptable size as opposed to schools of smaller size,
6. reorganization and reassignment of personnel. (p. 10)

According to Johnson (1982), the key to successful change in grade configurations rests in the implementation of it. He believes that the factors which ultimately decide grade

configuration are already set and now it is a matter of implementing the model. He presents the following set of guidelines for grade organization change in schools.

1. Begin the planning process and the identification of alternatives with a clear understanding about what research says (and does not say) about grade organization.
2. Any change in grade organization should be planned well in advance of the actual change and this change should be designed to accomplish needed curricular and staff development improvements.
3. A successful shift in grade organization is more likely when special attention is directed to the needs of new groups of students to be accommodated in a school.
4. Regardless of the type of grade organization change under consideration, all staff members must be encouraged to work toward an articulated K-12 program.
5. The rationale for any change in grade organization should be carefully communicated to both parents and the general public. (p. 110)

The implementation stage is very important and requires special attention. Here are some further tips from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Resources (1998):

1. Visit or call other schools with the same configuration for information sharing about what works and what does not. Consider what configuration fits best with community geography and values.
2. Be aware of developmental differences or similarities between students at different grade levels when developing curriculum, scheduling, and behavioral expectations; also consider how building layout and staff interests and training might best dovetail with the developmental characteristics above.
3. Develop articulation and transition activities between schools in the K-12 sequence. (p. 7)

Feld et al. (1980) in completing a report on the feasibility of a grade level reorganization for the Providence School system, which eventually recommended a K-8 and 9-12 grade span, put forth

a list of assumptions that were used in assisting the decision makers in developing the policy. These included:

1. students should be able to walk to school
2. equal accessibility for students of all socioeconomic status
3. cost efficiency and structural soundness of buildings
4. the buildings must be able to accommodate a variety of instructional approaches and programs
5. the school should be a community school
6. maximum population should range from 500-600 students
7. a commitment to close, renovate and build schools as required
8. the needs of the early adolescent and curriculum and instruction must be met
9. the decision should be a collaborative one involving administrators, teachers, students, parents and the community. (p. 15)

The above does not represent an exhaustive list of considerations for determining grade configuration but rather a starting point for such. Removed from this list are such things as: the cost of renovating a building for another configuration, the consistency of the grouping with the community's needs and values, the training of the staff which inherits the new configuration, the locations of the school in relation to others, the size of the student population, the number of elective courses available, the opportunities which exist for teacher collaboration, the maintenance of stability and continuity in the event of huge student population turnover every two or three years, and the financial resources are available.

The following is a list of considerations as outlined in a report from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Resources (1998, p. 10-11). These points were very similar to

those raised in the committee discussions and assisted in helping to clarify the problem and lead to making a decision.

1. Will the configuration increase or decrease transportation cost?
2. How far will students have to travel?
3. Will the configuration increase or decrease parent involvement?
4. How many students will be enrolled at each grade level and what implications does this have for course offerings and instructional grouping?
5. Are any data available that suggest whether the configuration might boost achievement scores for a significant portion of the community's students or depress the performance of others?
6. Will the configuration lead to the loss of a neighborhood school or the closing of other schools in the system?
7. How many transition points of transition and articulation will occur in the K-12 system? How will these be addressed?
8. What mechanisms or channels of communication will be used to ensure that students move slowly through the system, in terms of both academics and social and emotional adjustment?
9. Does the configuration allow for interaction between a range of age levels and a variety of grouping options?
10. How will the presence or absence of older students affect younger students in a particular school?
11. Is the design of the school building suited to managing

students in the selected grade span? For instance, does the building have several wings, useful for dividing a large middle school into houses or for keeping younger students in self-contained classrooms?

DiGeronimo's study (as cited in Lake, 1985) provides a list of several commonsense approaches to making a grade organization change. The committee noted that while the configuration was district wide, it was the individual schools which must contend with the difficulties involved in these moves. These steps are meant to address local school concerns:

1. The principal must take the lead in persuading parents of the value of the change. Parent Information Nights, coffee clatches, and "road shows" can be used to inform and answer questions.
2. Give an assembly for incoming students in their old school and an orientation in their new building, led by upperclassmen.
3. Sell the idea to existing students, showing them how expanding the student body can bring in additional funds and opportunities.
4. Use the need for more staff to select the best teachers available.
5. See if, in sprucing up the campus for the change, you can get additional amenities, like gymnastic equipment.
6. In the first few weeks of the plan allow for upsets and confusion. Be available to help the new students.
7. Carefully review school rules to see if they are appropriate for new students.
8. Praise your new students when they adapt well.
9. Make the grade reorganization a happy experience (p. 13).

Middle School or Junior High School

The age group which covers young adolescents, some maintain, has been neglected within educational settings and often grossly

misunderstood. This group contains junior high students, aged twelve to fifteen. Their physical, social and emotional changes have caused many debates as to how the education system can best serve them. They have been shuttled into and out of most grade spans from the primary/elementary system to the senior high school system. Hough (1995) points out that the middle school or the school that attends to the needs of the 10-14 year old (grades 5-8) is rapidly replacing the traditional junior high school. He does admit that there is not enough empirical evidence to support an ideal grade span configuration even for this group.

He feels that the implementation of child centered programs and student paced learning at the 6-8 and K-8 grade levels confirms this arrangement as opposed to the 7-9 or 7-12 grade spans where departmentalized teaching styles and rigid expectations seem to dominate. He says that while the "elemiddle" school holds great promise it will probably be the criteria of economic necessity, personal preference and community needs that will ultimately influence the decision.

Didham (1991) proposes that grade nine is more closely associated with the senior high school as ninth graders are more like 10th, 11th and 12th grade students. Another benefit, according to the Jefferson Township School's Study (1977) reorganization program, of putting grade nines with the senior high school, is that it would eliminate overlapping of some programs. Wihry, Coladarci and Meadow (1992) researched the issue

and suggested that grade span configuration may have an influence on academic achievement. When socioeconomic status, and various school and teacher attributes were considered they concluded that for grade eight students, an elementary K-8 setting did result in more favorable academic outcomes, whereas a secondary setting (junior-senior high) was the least favorable.

The Junior High School Movement

According to the Educational Research Services (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) the Junior High School Movement was "an attempt to identify how best to house the middle grade student in a school suited to their needs and interests" (p. 23). The first solution 7-8-9 began in 1910. The goals and functions of the Junior High School were to:

1. design a program that took into consideration the individual differences among students,
 2. introduce college material earlier,
 3. provide educational opportunity,
 4. relieve congestion in the school system,
 5. use existing buildings better,
 6. provide a gradual transition from elementary to high school,
 7. provide some vocational education to potential dropouts.
- (p. 16)

The junior high school was started to alleviate the crowded situation created in the post World War 1 population boom. There were changes in the original purposes such as the implementation of Vocational Education programs for the potential dropout. This situation declined because of child labor laws, compulsory attendance and a different social order. The junior high school now became a program that included a basic general education,

guidance and a strong exploratory aspect. Thus, researchers found that the function of the junior high school now became:

1. integration of the students previous experience with education,
2. exploration of the students aptitudes and special talents,
3. guidance,
4. differentiation of opportunities for learning,
5. socialization for participation in society,
6. articulation between elementary and high school. (p. 17)

There was a "variance in programs, practices and grade organizations among junior high schools ...and a difference between the practices of junior high schools and the functions that educational theorists postulated" (p. 17).

According to Gruhn and Douglass (1971) by 1940 the Six Essential Functions of junior high schools were integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization and articulation.

Evaluation showed that junior high schools failed to live up to the hopes and expectations of the junior high movement. It did not compare favorable to the traditional K-8 configuration. However, by the end of the 1930's there was improvement. Lake (1985) said, "by the 1950's and 1960's some felt that junior highs failed in their mission, being merely miniature high schools" (p. 2).

The Middle School System

By the 1960's many questioned whether or not the junior high school was the best answer to preadolescent and early adolescent education. Read (1969) reasoned that the Junior High School was

not working because it attempted to take the senior high model and impose it on the 7-9 student. She said that teachers in these levels did not have the appropriate training for these students; there were few exploratory programs, little continuity among the three levels of schooling, and the physical, mental and social maturity of the grade nine made them more like the senior high student.

As an alternative, the middle school system with a 5-8 or 6-8 configuration was considered a more humanistic approach to teaching the total child. According to Read (1969) Middle School advocates attacked the junior high school saying it:

1. never achieved its original purposes,
 2. evolved into a 'cheap' imitation of the high school,
 3. the 9th grade continued to emphasize college preparation despite being housed with the 7th and 8th grade,
 4. tended to encourage racial segregation since it delayed movement from the neighborhood until 7th grade,
 5. academic structure was too departmentalized,
 6. adopted the social practices of the senior high school.
- (p. 3)

In addition, they said the positive reasons for the middle school included:

1. a focus on the education of the whole child and not just the intellect,
2. a willing attitude on the part of teachers toward experimental instruction, open classrooms, team teaching and student grouping by talent and interest rather than by age,
3. a program that eased the transition between childhood and adolescence. (p. 16)

Atkins (1968) says that there are three distinguishing characteristics of the middle school. "There are the attitudinal stance, supportive instructional strategies, operational

flexibility and innovative practice that separate it from the junior high school (p. 118-119).

According to a report on the merger of schools in Cleveland County and Shelby City:

Most scholars writing today tend to support the establishment of the middle school as a notable means by which the instruction of early adolescents can be improved and there is little opposition to the notion that grade nine students belong in the high school. (Cleveland County: A Special Report 1988, p. 11)

Allen (1990) listed several other reasons for the establishment of middle schools. They included:

1. remedying a weakness of a two level organization,
2. moving grade nine into high school,
3. providing more specialization for grade 5/6,
4. eliminating crowded situations in other schools,
5. separating older and younger students. (p. 27)

DeYoung, Howley and Theobald (1994) says that the emergence of the middle school was supported because of:

1. interests in creating a new organizational form to counter the effects of de-facto segregation without increased use of bussing,
2. efforts at creating new organizational structures to deal with overcrowding of high and elementary schools,
3. a 'bandwagon' effect where the middle school concept appearing in one city led to the demand in other places to be likewise reform oriented. (p. 14)

Much of the impetus for the middle school was from the baby boom created by post World War II, again a solution necessitated by an extreme population shift. Towards the end of the 1960's there was still rapid growth (Table 4). There was still a lack of standardized operating reminiscent of the junior high school. National studies showed that the middle school failed to achieve

the goals of the movement. In comparing it to the traditional school organization (except junior high schools) there was little negative impact on achievement and attitude. Several studies pointed to the failure of the movement due to the poorly trained teachers and administrators.

As Allen (1990) points out the problems associated with establishing middle grade schools in Vermont were numerous:

1. concern over 'lack of academics',
 2. teacher apathy,
 3. personalities that make it difficult to team,
 4. getting to know and understand middle school students and programming,
 5. scheduling time for teaming,
 6. teacher training,
 7. changing teacher's old habits and attitudes,
 8. working toward interdisciplinary units,
 9. changing staff attitudes from junior high mentality to middle school mindset,
 10. need to keep community informed of middle school needs.
- (p. 27)

The early 1960's Middle School Movement was based on the notion that more attention should be given to the special needs of the preadolescent. There was a strong indication that the middle school took root because of the different rates of development among teenagers in the modern era. Alexander (1984) says that the middle school evolved because "(1) the earlier maturation of boys and girls during the middle years, with related increasing concern about the traditional program's match with the needs of that age group and (2) local problems of buildings, enrollments, desegregation, and other such matters" (p. 14).

Brooks and Edwards (1978) identified three reasons for middle schools. These were (1) to provide a program specifically designed for children in this age group (2) to bridge the elementary and high school better (3) to move grade nine into the high school. The major inferences of the trend was that grade six was becoming a part of the middle level grade span and grade nine did not belong in the middle school. In the study, they say that while the 6,7,8 span may not guarantee a markedly different educational program, these organizational grade structures symbolize commitment to the middle grade philosophy.

The shift was to redevelop the Junior High school into a 5-8, 6-8, 7-8 structure and place the grade nine in the Senior High school. But why attempt to separate the grade nine from the rest of the young adolescent pack? Again, the validation of this move was suspect at best; however there was some preliminary biological and psychological evidence as indicated below.

Tanner (1962) said that the human biological being is maturing at an accelerated rate. Dacus (cited in Blyth, Smith & Hill, 1984) found that there was the least difference in a number of variables including emotional, physical, social and opposite sex choices between students in grade 6 and 7 and the student in grade 9 and 10. He was concluding that there was more similarity between the grade nine and ten then between the ninth grader and those younger adolescents.

Elkind (1978) states that the inability to adjust to the

physical and biological changes pales in comparison to the mental changes affecting cognitive and affective domains when attempting to determine middle school configuration. Epstein (1980) suggests that the preadolescent has not yet reached a level of formal operational reasoning whereas Flanders (1987) says that otherwise middle schoolers are confronted with repetition and drill and become disinterested. Sylvester (1982) in comparing the sexes, provided some findings which while supporting females ninth graders as part of the senior high school, did not propose that grade nine males should be placed similarly. He says there are significant enough differences in brain growth patterns between boys and girls that boys may be ill equipped to handle formal operations.

Hensley (1985) says that there are growth spurts at grades 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10. He believed that these periods of growth signaled enough bodily changes that keeping children of similar size together could have learning advantages. Baldwin (as cited in Erb 1982) investigated the relationship between perceptual styles in students in grades 5-8. He found that "if students are to succeed in areas of achievement, then students need to be arranged in grade organizational patterns that best suit their styles of learning" (p. 9). He concluded that there was significant difference between the grade five student's perceptual scores and those of students in grades 6-8. He reasoned that it would be academically advantageous to arrange to

have the grade six through eight housed together.

Baker (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) attempted to determine the differences in student achievement, attitude, intelligence, teacher attitude and organizational climate in a change from a junior to middle school organization. Conclusions as they relate to the effects of changing to a middle school are:

1. improved teacher attitude,
2. trend toward open climate,
3. healthier student attitude,
4. higher academic achievement,
5. no change in IQ. (p. 85)

Opposition to this notion was raised by Gatewood (1972) and Calhoun (1983). They concluded from the available research that:

1. Little if any difference may be ascertained in the area of academic achievement between the junior high school and the middle school.
2. Middle schools and junior highs are more alike than different and differ in name only.
3. The single most important variable impacting learning is the quality of school curricula - not grade level configuration.
4. Ninth graders' development/maturation stages are more like 10th graders; 6th graders are more 7th graders.

Further support came from a Thornburg and Jones study (cited in Erb 1982). They investigated the social characteristics of grade 8's and 9's. These characteristics included such items as dating behaviors, self-esteem and social roles. Their findings were there are no significant differences. They conclude that

"results such as these suggest that the primary focus in education should be on understanding the nature of the early adolescent and then focus on the organizational and administrative features that best meet these needs" (p. 107). It is understanding the individual needs of the student that should drive the school/educational decision making.

Perhaps the issue of grade configuration is more one of perception than reality. Doda (1984) found that teacher practices and perspectives, organization, curriculum and administration accounted for most of the variance between school types. Hough (1991) having reviewed a series of quasi-ethnographic studies called 'shadow studies', carried out between 1964 and 1990, concluded that "teachers make the difference". Teachers exhibited such a large degree of control over individual programs and curricula that school organization variables could not account for much variance" (p. 17).

Hough (1989) showed that schools with 7, 8, 9 grade spans provided more specialized personnel than 6, 7, 8 schools and more club and activities than either K-8 or 6, 7, 8. McPartland (cited in Hough, 1991) states that no single design would be best, because various combinations of organizational and instructional features could be made to work well.

Perhaps there are other factors which drive grade configuration and that it alone cannot determine student achievement and socialization. Hough (1991) concluded that:

While grade configuration may well be indirectly related to staffing and policy, the optimum configuration cannot be determined until consensus is reached on what type of educational program is most beneficial. Until then the organizational issue will most probably rest in the conventional wisdom of decision makers and remain a function of personal preference, community needs and economic necessity. (p. 23)

Kruse (1996) believes that the issue of addressing the needs of the young adolescent by developing middle schools is not working. He says that there is "a wide pedagogical gap between the primary and secondary sectors and extensive differences in classroom management techniques and student-teacher relationships as well as learning strategies" (p. 4). He further states "the young adolescent is the inheritor of an educational structure that is historical rather than natural, that derives from a time when schooling stopped at the primary school gate and when adolescence began much later than it is generally believed to begin now" (p. 6).

Concerns are expressed by Toepfer (1990) when he speaks of the problem associated with the adolescent placed in a 6-12 or 7-12 structure. He believes that while they are not insurmountable that it is imperative that school districts develop programs specific to the needs of the young adolescent in these grade spans and they must not be sacrificed for the sake of high school program priorities.

Some of the literature proposes that there is a benefit to having grade nine students in a 9-12 grade configuration. However, there has been concern expressed that in such a

configuration, grade nine students receive a form of instruction that is less individual-oriented and self-paced.

Beauchamp (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) looked at student achievement, attitude, intelligence, teacher attitude and organizational climate in changing from a junior high school to a middle school organization. In the middle school it was found that there was "(a) improved teacher attitude, (b) better mental health and (c) improved attitude toward school, (d) a marked change toward openness, and (e) improved achievement" (p. 86).

Bryan and Erickson (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) in comparing the two types of schools for the young adolescent found that the implementation of the middle school program had a positive impact on parents, teachers and peer groups. But that there was no greater positive effects on student satisfaction with the school nor upon student achievement.

Glissmeyer (1969) in researching which setting, a middle school or elementary, was most beneficial to sixth graders did not assign an overall superiority to either type of organizational or grouping arrangement. Rankin (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) did a study of the pre-and post-attitudes and academic achievements of students in grades 5 through 10 in a change from a junior high to a middle school and found that the attitudes of students in the middle school arrangement were healthier than junior high students. Academic achievement was found to be somewhat higher in middle schools. Strickland (cited

in Hawkins et al., 1983) studied grade 7 and 8 students who changed from a junior high to a middle school and discovered that junior high students had higher scores on achievement tests, had slightly higher degree of negative feelings toward school. Their self concept was unaffected and there was little change in instructional procedures of teachers.

Summers and Wolfe (1976) concluded that all types of students in junior high school did better if they went to a school which was part of an elementary school. They had found that being in an elementary school in the eighth grade increased student achievement by 4.3 months. Feld et al. (1980) in recommending that the Providence school system move to a K-8, 9-12 structure cited evidence that compared students in a K-6 school. Students in a K-8 school were less likely to experience anonymity, have a lower degree of victimization, and are involved in more extra curricular activities. Compared to their intermediate counterparts they are less involved in drug and alcohol related problems, and have a smaller degree of truancy and behavioral problems. Also stated was the advantage of having only one transition.

Becker (1987) points out that when considering grade six students from elementary schools and middle schools there is a difference in academic achievement. He says that having a small number of teachers within the elementary setting benefits those students of low socioeconomic status. Having between class

ability groupings in the middle school benefits students of high socioeconomic status while with-in class ability groupings is advantageous to low socioeconomic students in reading.

The Transition Issues

While research on grade configuration and its impact on the academic success of students is inconclusive there is some substantial research which suggests some areas which warrant further investigation. There is evidence that the transition years, that is, those years in which a student moves from an established configuration into a new configuration, has a crucial negative impact on the academic achievement of students. Alspaugh and Harting (1995) found that there was a sharp decline in academic achievement for those students entering grade seven in a 7-12 school system from a K-6 school system. In comparing the academic achievement of grade 7 students in a K-8 school there were identical results except for a sharp decline experienced in the transition year. This implies that a grade configuration, which emphasizes the fewest transitions, may be in the best academic interests of the student.

It is also believed that transition years also effect the self-esteem of students. Thornburg and Jones (as cited in Erb, 1982) studied the relationship between development, schooling and self-esteem. They found that "transition occurring at lower grade levels is more likely to affect early adolescent self-esteem than later structural transitions" (p. 113). Therefore, it is

important to minimize transitions with younger students and have them change schools at a later age. Such conclusions support the K-8, K-9, K-12 structures where the student would enter a new school after age thirteen or fourteen if at all.

The age a transition occurs can also have an effect on the student and their self perception. From the findings below it may be that maintaining the thirteen year old in a school with younger students may have less negative effects.

Blyth, Simmons and Bush (1978) looked at several characteristics of grade seven students in a K-8 and K-6 configuration. For the seventh grader in a K-8 configuration, they found that the student was: "(a) more influenced by peers, (b) more positive about themselves, (c) more participative in activities, and (d) feeling less anonymous" (p. 149-169).

They also felt that the seventh grader who attended a K-6 school was more academically oriented, internalized a greater sense of responsibility, was more victimized, and preferred to be with close friends.

Allen (1990) in surveying twenty three middle schools in Vermont found that certain articulation practices were used by some schools while others did very little to articulate the transition. The visitation of students from feeder schools to the middle school was the most prominent. However, those schools that expanded their articulation process to include having middle school students taking advanced courses at the senior high school

or sharing faculty with elementary or high school reported smoother transition periods for the students.

Sergiovanni (1995) speaks of the necessity of returning to a community approach to schools and forsaking the grade fragmentation approach to school structure. He comments that while student difficulties seek to decrease with age that changing schools causes them to flare up once again.

The Canadian Experience

West Vancouver School Board

There are other examples of where grade configuration has been altered to address specific needs. School District 45 of the West Vancouver School Board on January 20, 1998, passed a number of motions at its public meeting regarding the change in grade configuration. Ten elementary schools were configured into K-7 schools; one school configured to grade 8-10 and another 8-12. A primary K-2 was also reconfigured to K-3. Other pertinent motions included the superintendent having to report to the school by March 1998 on the process to be used to facilitate the reconfiguration with a directive to involve parents, staff and students. Furthermore, direction was given to reassess the change in April of 1999.

Citing this initiative as "Facilities for the New Millennium", the board provided the reason for this reconfiguration as "changing population trends resulting from government funding freeze prompt re-evaluation of grade

configurations at elementary, middle, and secondary schools" (p. 1). Ironically, the board voted to reopen some schools that had been previously closed in the mid eighties due to declining populations and now found itself reacting to the "echo boom" of the 90's. This school board has a substantial transient population. According to the report, although the provincial government has lifted its freeze, the population shifts are upon them and they are now forced to address it. Some of the solutions to this problem, although, somewhat undesirable, were necessary. These included shift systems in some schools, the addition of temporary classrooms in others, and the "magnet effect" in some schools causing the crossing over of some families into other schools.

The board felt that this reconfiguration was necessary so that its schools could return to a grade range that is consistent with the rest of the province: K-7, 8-10, 11-12. In the report the board listed several benefits to the reconfiguration. These included:

1. children would be staying in their own neighborhood, at the school and with the teachers with whom they are already familiar and comfortable, for longer,
2. better curriculum coherence,
3. continued high levels of academic achievement among grade seven students,
4. teachers who would be assigned to the grade 7 classes would be well versed in the needs of that age group and have expertise in teaching that particular age group. This would be compatible with the concept of having children spend more time with one teacher,
5. relieves the concern of the parents of one school that a 12-year-old is too young to be thrust into the secondary school movement,

6. by continuing their education in the elementary schools grade children will have more chances to participate in extra curricular sport and fine arts programs and as seniors will have more and better opportunities to develop leadership and mentoring skills. (p. 4)

The board acknowledged that this would also allow it to reduce the overcrowding at the secondary school level. It allocated \$250,000.00 to the reconfiguration process. The board, after providing an extensive list of the positives of such a move, offers just three negatives to this change.

Summarizing, it said that it may disappoint some grade sixes, reduce the space flexibility at elementary schools, and that there would be a loss of rental revenue at one of the schools.

The report does not state what the effect of such a reconfiguration would have on academic success. Reference was made to the issue of grade sevens maintaining the high academic standards they had under the old system. It was mentioned that this would be in keeping with the middle school philosophy. However this implies that in the mid eighties when the schools were shifted to K-6, the middle school philosophy may not have been so strongly supported even though it was a philosophy which had been around for some time.

The Halton Board of Education

In 1996 the Halton Board of Education in Ontario, as part of its School Programs Renewal, investigated the issue of grade configuration. Like many boards across the province and across

the continent, there existed a variety of configurations. The process invoked was extensive and involved a research component and a committee structure composed of representatives from staff, trustees, teacher's unions and principals' associations. An examination of configurations outside the board was done, and focus groups were held with parents, students, and staff.

The direction given to this group was to identify a preferred model of school organization for Halton, which compares the current organization with one that requires only two schools for each student. The recommendation was made that the board support a variety of school configurations, but that where the community was prepared to support a K-6/7-OAC configuration that it be implemented. This would be carried out only if space were available in existing secondary schools with minimal modifications. A board committee with wide representation would assist any reconfiguration and the long-term effectiveness would be monitored for a two-year period.

In carrying out its mandate, an abundance of information was collected. Questionnaires, focus groups, delegations, and open forums all provided direct input. From the research, the committee made several statements including:

1. School configuration was not a predominant factor in an educational organization's ability to create an optimum learning environment for students.
2. Schools should be configured so that early adolescent students are in the same school for three consecutive years. e.g. Grades 6-8, 7-9
3. Since there is lack of evidence supporting any single grade configuration that a school district select the format

that best fits with its facilities and curricular configurations. (p. 4)

The main conclusions of the committee were that the board should maintain its present variety of school configurations giving the rationale that the parents and school communities did not prefer the two school (K-6, 7-OAC) model. There was a feeling expressed by the committee that this arrangement would not increase program effectiveness. They did suggest that the board could adopt the two-school model where there was general support for it and the cost factors involved in renovating existing facilities were minimal. Furthermore, they recommended that only one school should be permitted to configure to a seven to graduation school, but that it should be done within the "school within a school" model with separate administrations and staffs with the appropriate expertise. It was also recommended that over the next six years a team should be established to evaluate the grade 7-graduation configurations.

An insightful proposal by the group was that schools that is configured along these lines should be treated as new schools and staffs should be hired specifically for them. Such staff should want to teach in this type of school thus intimating that the provisions of the collective agreement for that board be flexible in this situation. The committee also felt that an implementation team for the school should be instituted comprised of representatives from all the stakeholders. The implementation team should discuss topics ranging from the name of the school to

an orientation program and supervision of grade 7 and 8 students. Finally, the committee recommended against any partial implementation of grade seven and eight students into such a configuration because of what they cited as a non-viable option.

Summary of Canadian Experience

From the examples above, it is difficult to suggest a "best" grade configuration. These studies clearly show that grade configuration was not found to be an issue which these school boards deemed important enough to justify major changes. Perhaps, it is that in looking at school reform or renewal that it is necessary to investigate factors other than grade configuration in determining the most educationally viable school. The Carleton Board of Education in Ontario (1996), in researching the issue of school size, while advocating optimal size for elementary and secondary schools, does admit that the issue is not simply one of numbers. It points out that the school facility, organization, curriculum, instruction, teacher effectiveness, student and parent involvement are but some of the factors that impact on how good a school is in doing what it is supposed to do.

The Need to Develop Policy on Grade Configuration

Surprisingly while it seems to have engendered so many questions it appears incomprehensible that the research has not clearly delineated a superior grade configuration or at least suggest under which conditions certain grade configurations have

greater potential for achieving academic success and positive social adjustment.

The need to develop policy should be apparent. During the latter part of this project a school council in another school district used the research and preliminary findings of this project to assist in their decisions. With the declining enrolments province wide and the accompanying need to reorganize school districts, a policy that can assist in making decisions about the process to implement in adjusting grade configuration is a necessity.

There are obvious implications if one type of configuration is used as opposed to another. The K-12 school has different issues than the K-6 or 7-12 school. The type of educational community created is different in any of these cases. Therefore the choices as to which configuration to select are also varied. As Boyd (1988) suggests "the analytical paradigm calls for a systematic comparison of alternative policies in order to choose the most beneficial course of action" (p. 505). The task may not be to create a single policy to fit all, but rather to understand the educational milieu and configuration options that make sense and are available. Comprehending the need and setting the stage for change is as important as the change itself.

A part of the problem is that the debate on this issue has not been focused and when placed into a specific time and context grade configuration usually becomes a secondary issue. Another

problem arises when researchers attempt to provide empirical data to support one grade configuration over another. There are limited quantitative findings to substantiate any one grade span and even then the evidence is questionable and the conclusions drawn circumspect. The research is qualitative and very subjective in many instances. Lake (1985) says "statements on the paucity, poor quality, and inconclusiveness of available research are found in practically every scholarly review on grade configuration" (p. 2).

Another reason for the lack of a clearly delineated position is that other concepts such as non-graded schools, multi-graded schools and specialty schools are becoming the educational trends, thus a decrease in the emphasis paid to the impact of graded situations. It may be that in the absence of proper analysis, the full impact of grade configuration is missed.

Consequently, it is imperative that there be a well thought out action plan for selecting a particular configuration. A policy which lays out the options for this action plan can make the transformation more understandable and its success more probable.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The Setting

The Avalon East School Board is the result of the merger of six former districts comprising 82 schools in both rural and urban settings. It is a board that is experiencing a decline in student population with further declines of approximately four percent per year predicted for the next five years. This translates into a substantial amount of unused student spaces in the district, which has led to the establishment of a task force to review facility utilization and student deployment.

One issue that required investigation was a review of the "educational" considerations surrounding any reorganization. The grade configuration committee was created to examine the literature on grade configuration, consult with the appropriate stakeholders and assimilate the existing curriculum initiatives into a structure that would meet the objectives of the reorganization. Extraneous factors which also played a role in determining the conclusions regarding grade configuration were the instituting of the program of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, the restrictive economic conditions and the implementation of a philosophy advocating neighborhood schools in the post referendum era.

As stated earlier the grade configuration committee was struck by the Avalon East School Board to determine the best, if any, grade configuration for the schools under its auspices. With fifteen different grade configurations (Table 1) presently in place there was a consensus that the board should attempt to have its schools conform to a specific grade configuration wherever possible. However, before making this decision it was thought to be prudent to institute this committee and have it investigate the issue.

To assist the committee in its deliberations several initiatives were undertaken:

1. A program specialist with the Avalon East School Board completed preliminary research on the issue and provided the committee with an overview. This research included a limited ERIC review of the information on grade configuration and a subsequent precis of it. Additionally, several people within the university setting provided the specialist with their views on the subject. Copies of two reports written by two school boards in Canada on the issue were also obtained.
2. The Principals' Advisory Committee was asked by the school board to give its comments on what it believed to be the most appropriate grade configuration for schools. This advisory committee is comprised of representative principals from several schools within the district. Ten schools had responded to the district's request for some commentary on the subject.

3. A Task Force which was carrying out a mandate to explore ways and means of reorganizing the district met with the school configuration committee to explain its mandate and to discuss how it felt the committee could and would contribute to its work. A synopsis of this meeting will be provided later.

4. The Associate Director of Personnel for the school board, met with the committee and made a presentation on the ideal model and explained the effects that it would have on curriculum development, in-service and implementation. This will be discussed later in detail.

5. An extensive review of existing literature was completed and presented to the committee by the researcher. This review included information on the topic ranging from the 1960's to the present. Various models were presented, as were the pros and cons (Spencerport Public School, cited in Hawkins, 1983) of selecting a specific grade span (Appendix A).

6. The Director of Program Development for the Department of Education met with the committee to discuss the issue and provided some information regarding the implementation of the programs according to the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundations.

7. Three Program Specialists within the Avalon East School Board gave a presentation on the design of the new curriculum, the expectations regarding instructional methodologies and the identification of key learning stages for evaluation.

Creswell (1998) points out that "the backbone of qualitative research is extensive collection of data, typically from multiple sources of information (p. 19). In this project numerous sources of data were utilized. Different roles were undertaken by the researcher in gathering these various forms of information. Creswell (1998) goes on to say "in designing a study, one works with broad philosophical assumptions; possible frameworks, problems and questions; documents and audio-visual materials" (p. 24). Hammersley (1993) contends that research done in this manner tends "to lead to the generation of good, relevant and persuasive theory" (p. 28).

The Design

The Role of the Researcher

As a participant observer, the researcher provided the committee with an extensive literature review and analysis. It was also the researcher's responsibility to design the questionnaire for review by the committee, determine the sampling method, input the data, and provide the findings. As a member of the committee the researcher also entered the discussions and shared in the decision making of the group.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define participant observation as a researcher playing an established participant role in the scene that is studied. They further state that "participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in - the-world characteristic of researchers (p. 111).

Instrument Development

The process by which the questionnaire was developed, implemented and analyzed was determined by the grade configuration committee upon recommendation from the researcher. The committee had decided that one piece of information it required in reaching a decision about grade configuration was to conduct a questionnaire to a representative sample of those stakeholders that would be directly affected by the decisions.

The school board, before the establishment of the grade configuration committee, had asked members of its Principals' Advisory Committee to speak to their respective staffs about the issue of grade configuration. The principals involved were to receive input on several questions, collate the information and provide the school board with their findings. The committee decided this information was insufficient and consensus was that a more extensive sample was required since not all affected stakeholders had been given an opportunity to provide input.

It was felt that the information gathered was a good starting point and perhaps even an indicator of what to expect; however, there was a feeling that there should be a properly constructed and distributed survey to all parties in this issue.

The discussions surrounding the questionnaire development focused on several points. The first was with the questionnaire itself and the types of questions that should be asked. The issue of preferred grade configuration was the one dominant piece of

data that the committee sought. From the committee's perspective this information was crucial since it provided an indication of what people felt was the best grade span for schools.

The next issue was the distribution of the questionnaire. The committee felt it was imperative to garner this information from all the direct stakeholders i.e. students, parents, teachers and administrators. Although administrators and staffs from the schools represented on the principal's advisory committee had provided feedback, a wider representation was desired. Because of the time of year it was decided that the administration of each school would be responsible for ensuring these questionnaires were distributed and collected for return to the district office.

The committee expressed some concern about the actual purpose of this questionnaire and to what extent it would consider the results in coming to a decision on a board wide grade configuration. Debate surrounding this ranged from ensuring that the questionnaire was scientifically sound to questioning whether or not the committee should be bound by the results of the questionnaire.

The decision was made that while the questionnaire would be developed and implemented to ensure a high degree of accuracy and dependability, it was agreed that it was not the intention of the committee to carry out an extensive scientific research effort on the issue as time dictated that the information had to be provided to the district task force expeditiously. The main

objective was simply to obtain one further piece of information and then in the context of all the other factors the committee had before it to come to a decision regarding the appropriate grade configuration.

With these parameters agreed upon, the committee then instructed the researcher to design the questionnaire and return it to the committee for review. The researcher in designing this questionnaire, formatted it in such a way that it would require participants very little time to complete. The questionnaire was intended to gather comments regarding the participant's reasons for selecting one grade configuration over another and to possibly identify issues that the respondents believe are important to consider in determining the grade span of schools. With these provisions in mind it was decided that a questionnaire that would ask the crucial question of preference for a particular grade configuration, provide a space for reasons and then a short ten-item survey would suffice. (Appendix B) The ten-item survey was developed to see if some of the issues already identified in the literature had a similar result here.

To assist in the development of this phase a professor of Mathematics from Memorial University was consulted. Invaluable advice regarding the development of the questionnaire was provided. The necessity to place the most important issues first and to design the ten items in a manner so that the responses could be analyzed according to acceptable statistical practices

was pointed out. Information regarding the most appropriate method for sampling was provided as well as guidance during the analytical phase of the project.

To determine the types of questions that should be asked in this type of questionnaire a search of existing surveys on the topic was undertaken. Unfortunately, there was very little that was realized from this exercise since few surveys of this type had been done. National surveys on the issue had been carried out, but again the types of questions that were asked surrounding the issue of preferred grade configuration on these surveys were not relevant to the questionnaire being developed. The researcher investigated the different topics that writers had proposed had impacted grade configuration or had been impacted by it. A set of objectives to follow in designing the survey were developed. From this, a list of ten questions were compiled and the format of the survey finalized.

These ten questions, although not an exhaustive list, were deemed relevant to the proposed areas of academic achievement and social development. The committee endorsed the survey components as meeting its needs.

Upon completion of the questionnaire it was then formatted in such a manner that where applicable all respondents, regardless of their category, were asked the same questions. Demographic type questions were altered to more realistically reflect the true nature of the respondents. Next, the vocabulary

of the student survey was reviewed to keep the language as self explanatory as possible for those students in earlier grades. In this regard a review of the survey was completed by a primary teacher. To ensure that student surveys could be completed appropriately, it was decided that students in grade four and above would answer the questionnaire.

Sampling Procedures

After completion of this phase of the questionnaire development, it was returned to the committee for re-examination and approval. The committee decided to leave the distribution of the questionnaires to the researcher and board office. The researcher then consulted with the professor in Memorial University's Mathematics Department to determine an appropriate distribution method. It was decided to use a stratified random sampling method. Using the fifteen groups of grade configurations presently within the Avalon East School Board (Table 1) each student, according to the enrolments per school, was assigned a randomly generated number with the first student being in the first school. This was completed for each of the schools within the fifteen groups. Using the same process but a different group of randomly selected numbers, the parent surveys were designated for distribution. The appropriate numbers were generated for the teacher population within each stratified group and random numbers were applied. It was decided that the administrators would be treated as one population and the appropriate random

number was generated accordingly. Then, manually, each person within each stratified group was given a number and the appropriate respondent was selected and designated. An extensive amount of time and effort was spent in this preparation to ensure a high degree of validity to the responses.

A direction sheet was then prepared for the administration of each school outlining the reasons for the questionnaire, several methods of identifying the respondent selected to complete the survey and instructions for the return of the survey (Appendix C).

When this sampling process was presented to the school board for approval it was felt that the process was too complex and confusing. The decision was then made to streamline the process so that for each school, where there were students in grade four and above, the administration would be asked to randomly select two parents, two teachers, three students and one administrator to complete the survey creating a stratified random sample (Appendix D, E).

Data Analysis

After completion of the survey all data was inputted and analyzed. The information regarding the preferred choice of the respondents in the four categories was provided and the results from the ten item survey was presented to the committee. It was also pointed out that the researcher would carry out further analysis and report back on any finding that may be critical for

the committee to consider. To assist in data entry all the possible configurations under the Avalon East School Board were given a code. (Table 5)

There were two forms of data gathered. The first was statistical as to the respondent's preference of grade configuration. Additionally, the survey obtained statistical information on ten items which were scaled. Secondly, a voluntary descriptive summary section was also provided in each survey.

For the statistical information a simple means test was administered for each category of respondents as well as a combination of all the categories. This showed the degree to which the respondents favored one possible grade configuration in going from kindergarten to grade twelve over another. The ten item survey showed the respondents degree of approval or disapproval to a given statement. Again, a simple means test was administered. The comments provided by some of the individuals surveyed added a qualitative element to the survey and presented, in some cases, very insightful information as to how some respondents view grade configuration and its impact.

Limitations

Due to the complexity of the instructions, the lack of time remaining in the school year, and the need to administer the

Table 5**Legend for Grade Configuration Options**

OPTION	GRADE CONFIGURATION
1	K-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12
2	K-4, 5-8, 9-12
3	K-5, 6-9, 10-12
4	K-6, 7-9, 10-12
5	K-6, 7-12
6	K-8, 9-12
7	K-9, 10-12
8	K-12
9	K-3, 4-6, 7-12
10	K-5, 6-8, 9-12

questionnaire quickly plus the cost factors involved, it was decided by officials of the school board that rather than distribute them in the manner devised to ensure a higher degree of validity, the questionnaires would be distributed in a more streamlined manner as described previously. This change in the process for the selection of respondents would cause concern if it were crucial that the questionnaires be distributed in a

highly scientifically controlled random basis. However, given the intent of the questionnaire's use, the need to ensure that they were distributed and collected in a timely basis. It was felt that this method would not nullify the findings of this questionnaire for the purposes of the committee.

Another limitation is that the individuals surveyed were not given the pros and cons of each grade configuration. Thus, these decisions were made in the absence of crucial information. Administrators and teachers were probably advantaged in dealing with this issue. Finally, the fact that this survey was done at a time when there existed a large degree of confusion and fear on school reform may have affected the results. There may have been a protectionist approach taken by some of the respondents.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESULTS

The Statistical Results

This chapter presents an examination of the survey results gathered from a survey that was administered to representative groups of students, teachers, administrators and parents.

The questionnaires were collected over a three week period. The rate of return among the groups participating ranged from 68% to 79% (Table 6). Preliminary analysis (Table 7) showed that a large proportion of respondents favored a grade configuration of K-6, 7-9 and 10-12.

Table 6

Return Rate of Surveys

SURVEY TYPE	NO. DISTRIBUTED	NO. RETURNED	% RETURNED
STUDENT	240	171	71.25
Parent	164	112	68.29
Administrator	82	65	79.26
Teacher	164	120	73.17
Combined	650	468	72.00

Table 7**Preference of Grade Configuration Results**

OPTION	ADMINISTRATORS		STUDENTS		PARENTS		TEACHERS		COMBINED	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1	4	6.15	11	6.4	13	11.6	15	12.7	43	9.25
2	5	7.69	14	8.2	20	17.8	16	13.5	55	11.8
3	1	1.54	13	7.6	5	4.46	4	3.39	23	4.95
4	19	29.2	60	35.	41	36.6	40	33.9	160	34.4
5	8	12.3	15	8.8	5	4.46	10	8.47	38	8.17
6	16	24.6	25	14.	16	14.2	19	16.1	76	16.3
7	11	16.9	10	5.8	9	8.04	10	8.47	40	8.60
8	-	-	15	8.8	1	0.89	3	2.54	19	4.09
9	1	1.54	7	4.1	1	0.89	1	0.85	10	2.15
10	-	-	-	-	1	0.89	-	-	1	0.22
11										

A K-6 administrator whose preference was for a K-6, 7-9,10-12 school said that the climate of a K-6 school is built with influences from primary and elementary trained staff. Intermediate schools (7-9) are able to build unique transitional climates that contribute to the development of autonomous

students who are able to cope in the educational environments of the high school (10-12).

Other popular configurations included the K-9 and 10-12 grade span as well as the K-4,5-8,9-12 and the K-8, 9-12 grade configuration. Each of these registered over 10 percent while the K-6, 7-9, and 10-12 had been favored by over thirty percent of the respondents. Further analysis showed that while the above configuration was selected by the largest minority, in each case there were great differences between the teachers and administrators as a combined group and the parents and students as a combined group. Another K-6 administrator chose the K-4, 5-8, 9-12 configuration and cited the reasons as being the developmental stages of the child and further stated that the next best option would be K-8, 9-12 since it creates the long term relationship with students through the pre-teen years.

The teacher/administrator grouping selected the K-8, 9-12 structure more than the parent/student grouping. A K-6 teacher in selecting the K-8, 9-12 configuration supported it in saying that she preferred smaller groupings, that is, 2-3 classes of each grade. She noted that older children are better role models when younger children are around. Because junior high is a very difficult time, problems are often compounded in large Junior High Schools.

There was one item on the ten-item surveys (Table 8A-E) that was noteworthy.

Table 8A**Results of 10 Item Survey - Parents**

ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NO OPINION		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		MEAN
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	10	9.09	18	16.3	1	0.91	50	45.4	31	28.1	3.67
2	3	2.78	14	12.9	11	10.1	61	56.4	19	17.5	3.73
3	16	14.6	39	35.7	26	23.8	18	16.5	10	9.17	2.70
4	26	38.8	14	20.9	11	16.4	13	19.4	3	4.48	2.30
5	5	4.55	21	19.0	17	15.4	55	50.0	12	10.9	3.44
6	11	10.0	27	24.5	3	2.73	47	42.7	22	20.0	3.38
7	32	29.0	52	47.2	9	8.18	12	10.9	5	4.55	2.15
8	4	3.64	22	20.0	9	8.18	50	45.4	25	22.7	3.64
9	5	4.50	10	9.01	4	3.60	36	32.4	56	50.4	4.15
10	44	40.0	39	35.4	4	3.64	10	9.09	13	11.8	2.17

Table 8B**Results of 10 Item Survey - Students**

ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NO OPINION		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		MEAN
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	6	3.51	27	15.7	7	4.09	64	37.4	67	39.1	3.93
2	6	3.51	40	23.3	31	18.1	73	42.6	21	12.2	3.37
3	15	8.82	39	22.9	41	24.1	59	34.7	16	9.41	3.13
4	34	36.5	23	24.7	9	9.68	24	25.8	3	3.23	2.30
5	7	4.09	28	16.3	38	22.2	71	41.5	27	15.7	3.49
6	19	11.1	42	24.7	14	8.24	60	35.2	35	20.5	3.29
7	41	23.9	68	39.7	29	16.9	28	16.3	5	2.92	2.35
8	17	9.94	48	28.0	16	9.36	53	30.9	37	21.6	3.26
9	5	2.92	12	7.02	3	8.19	79	46.2	61	35.6	4.05
10	5	2.94	9	5.29	10	5.88	62	36.4	84	49.4	4.24

Table 8C**Results of 10 Item Survey - Administrators**

ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NO OPINION		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		MEAN
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	6	9.52	8	12.7	1	1.59	17	26.9	31	49.2	3.94
2	2	3.13	1	1.56	2	3.13	25	39.0	34	53.1	4.38
3	23	36.5	18	28.5	12	19.0	7	11.1	3	4.76	2.19
4	21	33.8	16	25.8	11	17.7	14	22.5	-	-	2.29
5	2	3.13	2	3.13	4	6.25	37	57.8	19	29.6	4.08
6	7	10.9	12	18.7	1	1.56	23	35.9	21	32.8	3.61
7	33	50.7	26	40.0	-	-	5	7.69	1	1.54	1.69
8	5	7.94	9	14.2	4	6.35	22	34.9	23	36.5	3.78
9	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	36.9	41	63.0	4.63
10	15	23.8	21	33.3	3	4.76	16	25.4	8	12.7	2.70

Table 8D

Results of 10 Item Survey - Teachers

ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NO OPINION		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		MEAN
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	6	5.04	19	15.9	3	2.52	44	36.9	47	39.5	3.90
2	2	1.67	10	8.33	4	3.33	59	49.1	45	37.5	4.13
3	24	20.0	51	42.5	30	25.0	9	7.50	6	5.00	2.35
4	36	30.0	23	19.1	38	31.6	18	15.0	5	4.17	2.44
5	4	3.33	17	14.1	7	5.83	69	57.5	23	19.1	3.75
6	6	5.00	20	16.6	3	2.50	56	46.6	35	29.1	3.78
7	35	29.1	71	59.1	5	4.17	6	5.00	3	2.50	1.93
8	4	3.36	18	15.1	5	4.20	45	37.8	47	39.5	3.95
9	2	1.67	3	2.50	1	0.83	46	38.3	68	56.6	4.46
10	15	12.7	23	19.4	7	5.93	4	36.4	30	25.4	3.40

Table 8E**Results of 10 Item Survey -Combined**

ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NO OPINION		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		MEAN
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	28	6.05	72	15.5	12	2.59	175	37.8	176	38.0	3.65
2	13	2.81	65	14.0	48	10.3	218	47.0	119	25.7	3.79
3	78	16.8	147	31.8	109	23.5	93	20.1	35	7.58	2.70
4	117	34.2	76	22.2	69	20.1	69	20.1	11	3.22	1.75
5	18	3.87	68	14.6	66	14.1	232	49.8	81	17.4	3.62
6	43	9.27	101	21.7	21	4.53	186	40.0	113	24.3	3.48
7	141	30.2	217	46.5	43	9.23	51	10.9	14	3.00	2.10
8	30	6.48	97	20.9	34	7.34	170	36.7	132	28.5	3.60
9	12	2.57	25	5.35	19	4.07	185	39.6	226	48.3	4.26
10	79	17.1	92	19.9	24	5.21	131	28.4	135	29.2	3.33

This was the issue of whether or not a student's marks declined when they first entered a transition school. A number of respondents felt this either did or would have a detrimental effect. A parent who selected the K-4, 5-8, 9-12 configuration who has a child in a 5-8 school wrote of the need to develop relationships within the school and to separate certain age groups. The parent then concluded by saying that she realizes

that one drawback would be the lack of specialization in subjects like Math and Science in the Junior High Years (7-9). However, she feels that "we need to remember that we are educating the whole child". There seems to be the issue of the effect of the transition years on academic success that requires further investigation. This was expanded upon in the review of the literature.

Much of the data that were gathered indicated that respondents did not believe that their particular grade configuration had any critical affect on the social development or academic success of the student. While the questionnaire did not inquire, responses given indicate that parents feel that either the grade configuration of the school they attended was appropriate or the grade configuration which their child now attends is the most appropriate. A parent with two children, one in a 9-12 and the other a K-9 school selected the K-8, 9-12 structure. She indicated that grade nines seem to be too mature to be with the younger children. Her son attended grade 9 at a K-9 school but then went to a 9-12 school for grade ten. She indicated that he seemed to be behind the children who had attended grade nine there.

The greatest degree of being prepared to change exists with the administrators and the teachers. This may be due to additional knowledge they possess or biases towards a particular

grade configurations that they may have taught in or administered.

However, in some cases respondents did not speak as much about configuration as they did about the type of education offered. A parent of a child in a K-4 school who chose the K-4, 5-8, 9-12 structure said that children would be in schools with similar social, educational and emotional needs and support systems. This parent wrote a lengthy discourse and ended by saying she would much prefer to see her children going to a school where the facility was not superior but the teachers and level of education were.

The questionnaire adequately provided data for that which it set out to investigate. However, the reasons for those decisions, the knowledge or lack of knowledge regarding other grade configurations, the lack of knowledge regarding their present school, the actual academic achievement rates of the schools and the types of communities in which these respondents lived are all points that could be considered in preparing a more scientifically accurate survey instrument in the future.

While for each category of respondents the largest percentage of respondents choose the fourth option, or the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 grade configuration, it is interesting to note their second and third preference. Administrators rated options 6 (K-8, 9-12) and 7 (K-9, 10-12). A 10-12 administrator favoring the K-8, 9-12 concept said that the K-8 model allows for leadership

development while the 9-12 allows for a more mature approach to school and expectations for the grade nine student who has outgrown the little junior high kids. A K-9 administrator who had chosen the K-9, 10-12 grade span said that there should be fewer streams so teachers get to know the students extremely well and they form an identity with the school. The combined percentages of their second and third choices outweighed their first choice which was option 4.

Parents picked options 2 (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) and 6 (K-8, 9-12) as their respective second and third preference. The parent of a child in a K-8 school who remained committed to the K-8, 9-12 structure said that K-8 children are used to one method/group etc., 9-12 preparation for being more independent in studies and in university.

Students felt that option 6 and either 2 or 8 (K-12) warranted second and third a tie between them. The sentiments of a student from a K-6 school who choose the K-8, 9-12 structure were that K-8 is good because you do not need to go to another school. 9-12 is good because people who are older do not need to be in school with younger people. A 7-9 student in picking the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 system said that he picked these because you have a variety of places where you can meet new friends.

Finally, teachers ranked options 6 and 2, second and third respectively. A K-9 teacher who selected K-8, 9-12 said that grade nine would have more options and specialist teachers in a

9-12 setup. Grades 7 and 8 would still be in homeroom classes and could positively influence and be influenced by the younger students. A teacher in a 6-9 school said that it would mean better use of resources and age grouping would be more homogeneous if the grade configuration were K-4, 5-8, 9-12.

The actual results indicate a fairly strong preference for the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 grade configuration. However these results should be tempered with the fact that a substantial number of questionnaires, approximately one third of the questionnaires, were distributed to people who directly or indirectly belong to that configuration.

When the results are combined option four is still the preferred choice amongst the greatest percentage of respondents. Clearly the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 configuration is the most popular form. However, it should be noted that options 6 and 2 are the second and third most preferred models.

The K-8, 9-12 model or option two is a configuration which is also finding new acceptance within schools across the continent.

The Response to Questions

The list of questions that were completed by the respondents confirm that there is no one concern among those who completed the questionnaire (Table 8A-E).

For question one, over seventy five percent are satisfied with the number of grades in their school. Familiarity with a

particular grade configuration may have influenced the choices made by some respondents. If they had knowledge or experience with other configurations they may have made a different selection. Stability for seven years in K-6 and Junior High would be a preparing ground for senior high was the opinion of a teacher in a 10-12 school who favored the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 structure.

Question two responses suggest that regardless of the grade span that most (> 72%) feel that the young students and older students seem to get along well. A K-4 teacher choose the K-9, 10-12 structure on the basis that these ages work well together and it is more likely that older students help younger ones in a variety of ways.

Question three does warrant further investigation as less than fifty percent of the respondents believe that it is safer being the older student in the school. A parent with a child in a 6-9 school favored a K-6, 7-9, 10-12 configuration because she felt that grade six should not be going to junior high mainly because they get picked on by the older ones. A grade eleven student in a 7-12 school who selected a K-9, 10-12 arrangement said that older students do not get along with younger students and older students are not good influences on younger students. The question and the response does not necessarily mean that the schools are unsafe, but rather indicate that the approximately

twenty seven percent who responded in the positive may feel that being older provides a certain advantage.

Question four indicates that close to one in four of those who responded either experienced a decrease in academics or feel that the transition year does have a negative effect on academics. The feelings of a student from a K-4 school who selected the K-5, 6-9, 10-12 arrangement were that he would like to stay with the teachers that he knew. He also felt that the kids that he did not know might be mean. Selecting a different configuration, (K-4, 5-8, 9-12), a 7-9 teacher said it would give students a sense of ownership in each school and would eliminate an environment where all students are going through different phases of adolescence. A K-12 teacher defended this type of grade span by saying that the relationships are stronger creating more school spirit, making it hard for kids to go to a new school in the middle of their schooling. This issue is supported by the literature and while requiring further research is an issue which should be highlighted during deliberations on grade configuration.

Question five indicates that a strong majority of respondents (> 67%) feel that there can be a positive influence created by having older and younger students together. A K-5 teacher who preferred the K-9, 10-12 grade span said that depending on the size of the school older students can help

younger ones. There are not too many children at the most difficult age groups, in the 7-9 configuration.

There seems to be general satisfaction with the academic offerings of the school system at large as attested to by the responses to question six. A 10-12 administrator who selected the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 arrangement said that the programs seem to be designed for these specific groups and the age and development seem appropriate. Senior highs need a good choice of program and young teens (junior high) need peers their own age (not senior high) was the opinion of a parent of a child attending a 7-12 school who selected the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 arrangement.

Over seventy-five percent took exception to any inference that the students in their school do not care about their work. This may have been a difficult question for anyone outside of the student population to answer with any great degree of validity. The student respondents did drop to approximately 62% while nearly one fifth agreed with the statement in question seven.

While over sixty-five percent felt that there was no discrimination in the school, in excess of twenty five percent believe that students are treated differently according to question eight. A teacher teaching in a 5-8 school chose the K-12 grade span saying that it is easier to offer specialty areas across the grades. She also felt that teachers teaching in one area in a K-12 school can more effectively and easily recognize student needs. A parent of a child in a K-9 school says in the K-

6, 7-9, 10-12 system kids can relate easier to one another in each of the age groups. There is a need for different rules and guidelines for dealing with each age group.

On question nine there was overwhelming support for the statement. Regardless of the type of school or its size there was a feeling that students are known and usually develop positive relationships with their teachers. A teacher in a K-4 school in suggesting the K-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12 structure said that the needs of that particular age group may be more clearly defined and addressed.

Finally, the issue of having multiple teachers teaching the student, fifty-seven percent said that it did not bother them; yet, thirty-eight percent did feel that it was a concern. One student from a 4-6 school noted safety and too many people in one school as reasons to maintain the K-3, 4-6, 7-12 system. A 7-12 administrator who favored the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 structure felt that the 7-9 children are too young to mix with adults in senior grades and that scheduling would be easier with less teacher crossovers. Generally, a large proportion would rather see fewer teachers, specific courses and fewer differing teacher/student interactions.

Summary of Results

The questionnaire showed that a large minority are comfortable with the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 grade configuration. The other grade configurations are much less preferable yet there is

not one obvious configuration to which a majority of administrators, parents, students or teachers would agree. There is a fairly strong allegiance by the respondents, to the system in which they presently find themselves. This may indicate several factors in addition to being pleased with the status quo. The respondents may not be aware of other configurations, do not know the pros and cons of each, or may be concerned about answering the question differently since they feel it could jeopardize the very existence of their school.

In the section on questions, there are a few items of note. Firstly, there seems to be a notion that older children are safer in a school than younger children. This may be influenced by the stories of swarming, media sensationalism etc. The issue of transition years has already been dealt with in length. Discrimination of some type also seems to be an issue. It may be due to the size of the school, class size, specialist versus homeroom teaching. Finally, there was concern expressed regarding the number of teachers that a student should have to deal with in a given year.

Overall, the questionnaire appears to show that there is a general satisfaction in most areas of the school system. Students of different age groups mixing well, good role modeling, satisfaction with program offerings, students caring about their work and a positive relationship between student and teacher all surfaced in this questionnaire. There are no glaring issues

identified by this questionnaire. It indicates that most respondents have a general satisfaction with the school system in this district.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROCESS OF POLICY ANALYSIS

In developing the draft policy, Brown's (1996) Realistic Model for Policy Analysis (Figure 1) was applied. This model as shown is not strictly delineated. It provides a framework which anticipates ambiguity, overlapping and fluctuation. The process is interminable and open to change. It is very fitting to apply this model, as the process of making policy for grade configuration is many times fragmented and not neatly intertwined. Decision making throughout the process was often unclear and questionable with some decisions exposing other problem areas.

The policy development process was beset with uncertainty at times due to the nature of the research and the lack of solid empirical evidence, qualitative or quantitative. The arrival at one desired configuration for schools was accomplished, yet in its path, the decision making process raised more questions than it seemed to resolve. These questions and problems were beyond the scope of this project.

Policy making in this instance required entering into those areas which are uncertain and unclear. As Brown (1996) points out, policy development involves utilizing Wildavsky's view that there will be multiple, conflicting, vague conceptions of the problems or goals and that the policy analysis will require looking and expecting to find errors. The process is ongoing and

does not lead to one final solution, but rather a re-formulation of the problems and an on-going search for new solutions. Thus, the process is never ending. As Downey (1988) states, "the concept adopted here is one of policy making as a cyclical process - one that never ends in termination or final approval, or whatever: rather one that is constantly in motion in the interests of continuous self-renewal" (p. 65). Ball (1994), in defining policy says "a policy is both contested and changing, always in a state of becoming" (p. 16). Furthermore, he states, "Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed" (p. 19). The issue of which grade configuration relies on many factors from the political, social, economical, contextual, pedagogical, to the geographical. The context under which the policy is developed will only narrow the decision making options, not necessarily resolve the specific problem.

Research on grade configuration is limited and in many cases poorly done. This in itself may illuminate the changing nature of grade configuration and the prospect that there is no one ideal configuration that can be simply applied to all situations. Thus, the committee was caught with having to make a decision, which in fairness to it, was an uncomfortable one as well as one in which there could not be total justification. The decision while acceptable and rational may have been less than totally correct.

Collingridge (1980) in expounding on this position says that not all decisions are rational and that decision making under ignorance or in the absence of all information may be justified. He suggests that the "rival fallibilist tradition denies the possibility of justification and see rationality as the search for error and the willingness to respond to its discovery" (p. 29). He states that the error in decision making does not necessarily lay with the decision maker, but rather with what he calls an "intractable" decision problem.

Boyd (1988) says that the view that policy analysis is simply a means of problem solving is incorrect and overly simplistic. He states, "this view fails to recognize the importance of policy analysis in re-conceptualizing policy problems or simply illuminating our understanding of complex policy questions" (p. 502). He further suggests that a function of policy making is problem finding or problem setting.

The link that was required by the committee to select one single grade configuration, which transcended the other possibilities, could not be found. A level of comfort was established and the decisions were made from that position. The knowledge gleaned from several sources, while assisting in the elimination of certain possibilities, did not allow the committee to settle upon one "best" configuration. This was confirmed since there were configurations recommended which did not comply with the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 model.

What initially seemed straightforward became intricate and confusing. At an OECD International Conference held in the Netherlands in 1995 it was stated that "the forms of knowledge that are relevant to education as well as the processes by which decisions are taken are diverse as well as complex" (p. 5). It became obvious that the resolution to the issue was more than simply the application of numbers and statistics.

Ironically the decision surrounding grade configuration cannot be resolved using only an educational framework. Extraneous factors impacted the decision making and created pressure which had to be addressed. Hirsch (cited in OECD Conference in the Netherlands, 1995) suggests that education must be viewed beyond pedagogy and epistemology because, if it is not, then there is fear that "the social, political and institutional relationships that influence educational outcomes will be neglected" (p. 25). He further states that "the ways in which problems are defined at a policy making level draw on informally acquired information, on individuals' experiences, on public opinion, on program evaluation" (p. 25). So, the task of defining the problem becomes many issues within the issue. Within the realistic model, it would be that defining the problem occurs only after much analysis, debate and research and only after the opinions of all those who are within the policy arena, as well as the external influences, are taken into consideration. Indeed the committee had at its disposal a number of sources of information.

However, in deciding upon the types of recommendations that were ultimately passed on to the district programs committee to consider, there were certain criteria that impacted more on the decision and eventually led to limiting the arena of decision making. While thought to be practical and sensible, this did not remove the element of doubt regarding the final decision. The intent of the committee was to assist the district task force in its deliberations. While the committee did adhere to its terms of reference, it can be argued that some policy decisions made would only provide temporary solutions and that sound educational reasoning did not always drive the decision making. The problem may not have been entirely addressed. The underlying ideology of grade configuration may not have been entirely understood and the implications not totally grasped. The committee, being under very tight timelines and lacking substantial empirical evidence to support one grade configuration over another, may not have realized that the problem had not been adequately defined.

Perhaps as Hallinan (1996) points out:

Voices recommend changes in policy, but typically fail to build on research findings. Still others rely on the results of studies but use them in simplistic and, at times, inaccurate ways, and thus fail to explain the complexity of the results and the conditions under which they occur. (p. 134)

Heene (cited in OECD Conference in the Netherlands, 1995)

says that to get at the root of the problem that:

a genuine problem solving process only begins when the solvers are willing and able to *problematize* the situation for their own purposes, even if the situation was already

presented to them in the format of a problem from outside.
(p. 43)

There was little doubt that the situation regarding the need to investigate grade configuration was understood, but problematizing the situation was hindered somewhat by other pressures. The grade configuration committee could not operate as though it were building from the ground up. Other factors over which the committee had no control determined in part the final outcome. In this situation, policy development and decision-making becomes a reactive approach to problem solving as opposed to direction setting and in-depth proper analysis of the alternatives.

Brown (1996) likens the problem area to a tangled web where confusion and uncertainty magnify the complexity of the problem area. It is one which begins with the vague image of what the problem may be, a clarification and an attempt to clearly focus the problem area so that decisions are taken which in turn assist in defining the problem.

According to Wildavsky (1987):

If policy problems arise from tensions, policy solutions are the temporary and partial reduction of tension. Solutions are temporary in that the conditions producing the initial dislocation change in time, creating different tensions. Solutions often carry their own tensions with them, and acting as their own cause give rise to different problems.
(p. 390)

In this case, the tension is created by the need to somehow rationalize the reorganization of the school board and provide the task force with input that it can use in its deliberations.

Schools must close and therefore, a set of justifications must be developed for these closures and the reworking of the grade configuration within some of the remaining schools in the district. The Atlantic Provinces Educational Framework severely restricted the options but the implications of not adhering to it could not be ignored. A different time and set of conditions could result in a different conclusion. Further decline in student enrolment, a change in programming requirements, or new findings on child development are some of the factors that could result in a change of a preferred configuration.

It may be argued that by assuming Brown's position, policy is valueless and unworkable and that the solutions created are doomed even before their implementation. First (1992) suggests that this is not the case, and that in fact, uncertainty may even be necessary so that "we can improve educational policy making, although it may be necessary to "let go the finishing" (May, 1985, p. 201) and "be content with incompleteness" (p. 16). It is not practical to anticipate that one size fits all or that a policy can withstand the test of time unless the factors affecting the policy stagnate or remain unchallenged ad infinitum. The context in which the decisions were made on this issue at this time will no doubt be different in the future. Therefore the real issue is to ensure that grade configuration is considered an ongoing issue that deserves continual renewal and reworking.

First (1992) uses a fourteen-stage policy development cycle, which concludes with the summative and formative evaluation stage signaling the commencement of the policy development cycle again. She says that the process is never ending and that the policy development cycle can ensure that the "administrator can avoid the undesirable policy-related role of victim of policy misdeed" (p. 231). Policies should be subjected to close scrutiny and should be fully understood at all its stages of development. Humes (1997), in speaking about the state of policy making in Scottish education says that, as is the case in most policy development, "the focus was on policy recommendations and their practical feasibility rather than on the processes by which policies were arrived at or the people who promoted them" (p. 20). He says that there has been a lack of a critical perspective in which policy has been approached.

Molitor and Dentler (1982) speak to the issue of managing decline and retrenchment. To determine policy, it is important that the problem be defined as clearly as possible. They looked at a number of middle schools in several districts in the United States and examined the planning and decision making processes that went into deciding the appropriate grade configuration for these schools. They outlined the following important steps for this decision making process:

1. *A careful review of district problems precedes consideration of reorganization or other possible sources.*

For the committee this was done and ultimately lead to the formation of the grade configuration committee. Declining enrollments and the attending issues surrounding this created a need. The task force on reorganization of the board required this information to ensure that when the board was reorganized that programming and instructional criteria were also addressed.

2. *Alternative definitions of the problem are posed and carefully considered.* The myriad of possible configurations and the pros and cons of each were presented. Insight was gathered from other provinces and the United States and their experience with reorganizing the grade structure.

3. *Adequate evidence of the problem is obtained.* The fact that there was an over capacity of empty spaces already in the board plus projections suggesting this over capacity would increase pointed to the need to find solutions so as to reduce costs in an era of fiscal restraint.

4. *The definition of the problem is shared by all of the team or a substantial majority of those affected by the decision.* The committee struggled with finding an adequate definition of the problem. What initially seemed to be a programming problem became a logistics i.e. cost, community school, facility-adequacy problem.

5. *The definition of the problem is clear and relevant to the situation; it is not stated in terms of a solution.* Again, it could be argued that the initial problem i.e. what configuration

will provide the best learning and social environment for students was unclear. The problem statement was not how to properly configure the schools within the district but rather which configuration can be instituted so as to maximize the benefits under a set curriculum model and a reduction in the number of schools and dwindling resources.

6. *Reorganization as a potential solution is reviewed by the team and any available information from outside the district is examined.* The review process was done, however a number of questions remain unanswered, such as what is the importance of the key learning stages at the periods as suggested. New Brunswick has deviated from this model. How have they adapted to the APEF and is it disadvantaging or advantaging the student?

7. *Various middle school program components are reviewed for relevance to the problem areas and criteria of effectiveness or suitability to the district and school are established.* Because of the time constraints involved, a closer examination of individual schools was not undertaken. This would have been beneficial. The final decision taken did meet the criteria of effectiveness and suitability for the reorganization and programming of some of the schools.

8. *Alternatives to reorganizing the middle grades are carefully examined; their merits and demerits are assessed according to certain criteria.* The task force had already set the criteria for the reorganization of the schools. It was predicated on economy

of scale as it related to the number of student spaces in existence, present financial resources and the anticipated future requirements. As such this was not an examination of the middle schools but rather the entire system.

9. *The final decision to implement middle schools or any other solution to the problem is shared by all, or a substantial majority of those affected by the decision.* The school board has held public meetings and will be holding further meetings to discuss these issues with the affected stakeholders. The committee through its questionnaire involved selected stakeholders in the decision. The committee after exploring the various stages of decision making selected a configuration that "it could live with".

10. *The solution is manageable, cost-effective and likely to have the intended impact on the district's problem (p. 43,44).* The decision taken by the committee meets these guidelines in that it reduces cost, provides more effective deployment of personnel and creates efficiencies in program delivery and administration.

Rist (cited in OECD Conference in the Netherlands, 1995) is more succinct in his analysis. During what he calls the policy implementation stage, it is realistic to expect that no problem stands still. "Problems and conditions change, both before and after a policy response is taken. The persistent problem is

whether the present policy is or is not an appropriate response to the current condition" (p. 145). He asserts that it is difficult, at best, to determine the success of a policy since policies are in constant flux. From this approach, the assumption may be made that it is inconceivable that a definitive perpetual solution can be obtained. As suggested many times, the decisions taken by the committee were not final or binding and that it was up to both the district committee as well as the school board itself to make the final decision. Regardless of the decisions made, there would be further shifting by other groups who may have different pressures to address. This, unfortunately, they do without the benefit of the debate, research and knowledge of the decision making process that evolved during the procedure leading up to the recommendations of the committee.

Brown's realistic model views policy making as never ending and assimilative. It assumes that what is arrived at is neither static nor immovable. It is flexible and accommodating. It is this open-endedness that makes the adoption of this model both attractive and pragmatic. The draft policy that resulted may provide some solutions, but mostly it provides direction for further decision making. The policy does not provide answers, it assists in developing the appropriate grade configuration without making the statement as to which is best. This remains in the hands of the stakeholders and decision-makers. With further declines in enrollment, geographic shifts and deteriorating

facilities, the realignment of existing schools and school populations will remain an issue.

The Committee Meetings

The committee was instituted by the Avalon East School Board to assist the board in deciding upon an appropriate grade configuration for schools under its jurisdiction. It held eight meetings between March 19th, and June 16th 1998. The composition of the committee lent itself to having differing sets of values. School board personnel differed from the administrators on the committee who in turn had some contrasting views from the teachers. The parents also held differing views at times. Thus initially the "the problem area is messy, confused and poorly understood" (Brown, 1996).

The subsequent meetings of the Committee illustrate how the Committee members worked through the four stages of Brown's Realistic Model. At the beginning, there was the initial recognition of a problem that had to be studied and for which policy was needed. Then there followed the clarification stage, when new information was sought, obtained and discussed. Then came the point when the Committee had to make decisions on how to proceed. Out of this, a number of recommendations were made. Finally, there was a more comprehensive understanding of the initial problem. Each of these stages will be described.

Problem Area

The first meeting consisted of discussions regarding the realignments being considered by the school board. The facilities review task force had completed the first phase and was now into phase two. It was felt by the board that the decisions respecting school closures and reorganization should not take place solely on the basis of the type and condition of buildings but also must consider curriculum implications, thus the need to review grade configuration. It was stated that the committee's decision may conclude with one configuration or a variety of them. The formation of the problem regarding grade configuration was overshadowed somewhat by the work of the task force and the goals inherent in it. The issue of grade configuration would not and could not be analyzed in isolation and neither could its impacts be the sole determinant. The impact upon the French immersion programming was to be reviewed and was to be considered in the context of the grade configuration of schools.

Clarification

In grappling with the topic the committee attempted to define and redefine grade configuration. The committee brainstormed and created a list of issues they felt they should keep in perspective as they proceeded to make their decision regarding a grade configuration for the district. The element of time was mentioned for which the view was that decisions on

realignment were forthcoming and that the committee would be expected to report by the end of the current school year.

The committee expressed concern that the decisions regarding school closures for 1998 had been announced and questioned whether or not their work had been pre-empted by these announcements. The committee was assured that this was not the case.

Much information was given to the committee by individuals from various organizations but primarily the information sources were from within the school board. In a presentation given by the Associate Assistant Director, Personnel, the importance of maintaining the integrity of the four curriculum based grade groupings i.e. K-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 in some combination was emphasized. Other school board personnel also felt that with the introduction of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundations, plus the organization of the Department of Education along these same lines, the formation of school board specialists in this manner, and the key learning stages, that the arrangements would provide curriculum based organizational consistency and school building organizational flexibility. This was one of the parameters that the committee established for itself later in the process. If the above principle was adopted then the options that the committee would have to consider would only be those as listed in the matrix provided by the Assistant of Personnel for the Avalon East School Board. (Table 9)

This would effectively reduce the options to be considered by the committee to eight and would constrain consideration of other models such as the middle school concept. This would be acceptable if the committee accepted that the curriculum was the sole determinant of grade configuration. Also outlined were the changes in building structure reorganization if this premise was adopted. The committee was presented with a list of items that were recommended for consideration on grade configuration. These items were developed from the literature and were meant to provide the committee with an understanding of those issues associated with grade configuration. Committee members rated these from most to least important.

A number of other concerns also arose. The discussion mostly revolved around the junior high school and problems, perceived or real, associated with it. This level was of most concern because when there is a reconfiguration at the primary or secondary levels it ultimately affects that level. Members felt that teacher training, appropriate staffing, transfers from that level for some teachers, in-service needs and ongoing professional development were crucial to addressing the needs of the intermediate area. Bussing requirements were also discussed and since funding was being reduced this would necessitate more

Table 9**Correlated Options under Atlantic Provinces Education Framework**

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION				
Division	Primary (K-3)	Elementary (4-6)	Intermediate (7-9)	Senior High (10-12)
Grades	K, 1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6	7, 8, 9	10, 11, 12
Option # 1	K-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
Option # 2	K-3	4-6	7-12	
Option # 3	K-3	4-9		10-12
Option # 4	K-3	4-12		
Option # 5	K-6		7-9	10-12
Option # 6	K-6		7-12	
Option # 7	K-9			10-12
Option # 8	K-12			

Source: Avalon East School Board

neighborhood schools. It was also stated that transition teams would be needed to facilitate the organizational changes. As is evidenced here in attempting to clarify grade configuration for the system an extensive amount of attention was now given to the intermediate school.

The next meeting entailed discussion of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation. Again, the need of conformity to what is proposed within this document was emphasized. The Manager of Program Development at the Department of Education joined the committee to discuss the pedagogical process involved in grade configuration at the Department level as well as to explain how the new program initiative might affect the committee's decision on grade configuration.

A number of items were addressed to assist the committee in its task. It was pointed out that the Royal Commission Secretariat had decided that school programming should be broken into primary/elementary/high school blocks. The Department of Education would maintain the current blocks of K-3, 4-6, 7-9 and Level I - Level III for its structural purposes. All in-service, curriculum development and administration would be carried out along these lines. The Atlantic Provinces, with the exception of New Brunswick would use these blocks. Since New Brunswick's configuration is different, it means that they must reformat their guides and documents to fit the foundation's program. It had adopted the U.S. middle school model and therefore had identified different key stages for testing.

The committee in attempting to clarify the issue zeroed in on the intermediate student. The middle school approach to teaching the young teenager brought up a number of concerns about

junior high schools. The following is a summary of these points as considered by the committee:

1. The junior high school had become a dumping ground for some teachers; thus, there is a need to better identify those teachers more suited for this area and proper training must be provided.
2. More interest is usually shown in the student at the primary level.
3. The issue of subject specialists is less pressing for grade 7 and 8 than for grade 9 in some subject areas.
4. The board should not wait for Memorial University to address the proper training of junior high teachers but should move unilaterally.
5. Intermediate teachers should have some elementary training.
6. Acceleration programs should be carefully monitored to ensure that the student is not denied any aspect of the curriculum.
7. While industrial arts and home economics are required as part of the core they may be compacted in grade 9 only.
8. Space is important in deciding the type of program in a school since it can cramp a teaching style.
9. Areas of lower socioeconomic levels require extra space.
10. The staff allocation formula should be reviewed for the intermediate area.
11. The role of the principal has changed and has become more difficult.

12. The scores on the CTBS indicate that regardless of configuration you can have an effective school of any configuration.
13. A recent mathematics indicator showed that the two top academic schools were a K-9 and 7-9 structure.
14. The K-9 school seems to like having a lead teacher or department head.
15. In the old 9-12 system students seem to do well.
16. In-service has become a major area of concern.
17. Regardless of the grade configuration suggested some schools would still be different for different reasons.

As can be seen by the points raised the committee was being advised very strongly that the need to conform to the APEF model was very important. The fact that all areas of curriculum within the province had been organized along those lines and that the department had been similarly structured were additional compelling reasons to adopt the model and see grade configuration from within that framework. Secondly, other components related to education were also under consideration as evidenced in the preceding points raised by the committee. As the process evolved and new information was collected, the problem area and those issues which were to be investigated, changed. It was an explosive situation comprised of multiple topics.

The Task Force on reorganization of the school board was in attendance at the next meeting to provide an update on their

progress and to answer questions. This was important for the committee as it helped to clarify the role of the task force and how the committee's findings and subsequent recommendations would affect the decision-making of the task force. Also, the task force, itself, was formed to deal with the fact that the school board now had 12,000 surplus student places which would increase to 16,000 by the year 2002. The decline of the student population is anticipated to be 4% per year for the next few years as well as a reduction in teaching positions. The consultants had broken the district into seven zones and were reviewing the capacity of schools under certain conditions. They were now awaiting the final decision of the grade configuration committee to proceed with further recommendations to the board.

They felt that a three tier i.e. K-6, 7-9, and 10-12 could comfortably be accommodated. However it was also suggested by the task force that certain zones within the board would probably be maintained or have an entirely separate configuration. The task force suggested that there would be some shifting since current distribution was done primarily by denomination and now would take place according to the neighborhood school concept.

There was an admission that school size may have to vary with smaller school sizes prevalent in inner city schools to address the effects of lower socioeconomic status. While the task force consultants admitted that they had no knowledge of APEF and the need for certain configurations they believe that it is

necessary that there should be a uniform configuration since otherwise there are cost implications. There is also a belief that the system is under-funded and that this places further pressures on it.

During questioning, the task force outlined the type of criteria used in making its decisions. These included such items as safety needs, site acquisition and utilization, parking and traffic considerations, bussing requirements etc. They had not given consideration to grade configuration in designing their scaling and evaluation mechanism. Grade configuration will now impact the type of recommendations that can be brought forward.

Some committee members felt that the issue should be program driven and that the decision as to which schools close and how the remainder are configured should be decided on the basis of this criteria. It was quickly pointed out that rarely is the decision made on this basis and that the board itself would have difficulty with spending millions of dollars if the recommendations of the committee required that.

The subject of how grade nine is scheduled in the 9-12 configuration was considered and it was felt that the grade nine program must fit into the senior high school model and not vice versa. Finally, it was asked if the committee was configuring according to what is or what will be, to which the answer was that the future in grade configuration is the next ten years and

that what is recommended by this committee will no doubt change in the future.

To the researcher this meeting represented a key point in the clarification of the problem for the committee. Not only had the issue of adhering to the APEF structure been further solidified it was now evident that the financial implications of any decision would have to be seriously considered. The time had come to make a recommendation to the school board. The issue had been focussed on the basis of conformity and economics primarily. This framework, as will be seen in the next few meetings will direct the decision making in providing both the board and the task force with its decision. A brief presentation was made by a program specialist with the board in which the point was again made that it was advisable to configure according to the structure laid down by APEF. Reasons for this included:

1. Deviation from this would mean that administrators and teachers within a given school would have to use more than one handbook for instructional purposes and curriculum delivery.
2. The handbooks developed are along these lines and should be adhered to.
3. Parents, according to one member, have been briefed on the importance of APEF and would probably support a configuration that is developed along those lines (at this point it was again suggested that there has been no pedagogical justification for these key stages).

5. Most of the provinces in western Canada and the Atlantic Provinces have been developed this way as well as the Pan Canadian curriculum.

6. To develop a grade configuration contrary to the APEF would create additional burden on the administration of a school.

During this stage the committee encountered some success with clarifying the problem area but because of the constraints it now faced its options vis-à-vis recommendations to the board were limited.

Decision-Making

The next step taken was to determine how the committee would attempt to reach consensus. An appropriate rationale had to be developed and to do this a criteria for decision making was created. It was felt that the decision would come from dialogue and consensus as opposed to the mathematical approach of a vote. Consideration of another grade configuration i.e. K-3, 4-9 and 10-12 was added. This configuration had not been included in the questionnaire since it did not exist within the present board yet it did meet the criteria as set down by the APEF. It was agreed that the committee would be broken into three groups of five to review each configuration and consider them in terms of the following criteria:

1. That the system of education delivery in Newfoundland is changing because of our Central offices' decision to incorporate the APEF's outcome testing.

2. That the language of the day is "high accountability" with standardized test results but school boards have limited resources.
3. That our goal is the achievement of academic, spiritual, social, emotional and physical growth for the students.
4. That there are other grade-span considerations as sourced from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Resources (1998).
5. That the outcome of the survey conducted showed a predominant preference of the K-6, 7-9 and 10-12.

Using these criteria each group was asked to record what they believed to be positive and negative points associated with each and report back. This represented a stage of further clarification as well as setting further parameters for the decision making.

The outcome from each group was as indicated in Table 10. Since there was no consensus at this stage, it was decided that the committee would reconvene at a later date to continue the discussion.

A number of recommendations then arose:

1. Bell Island would have its own configuration
2. North area and CBS would not have to conform
4. With remaining zones every effort would be made to have them conform, keeping in mind the neighborhood philosophy and APEF
5. Eliminate those options that do not fit APEF

The parameters for decision making were further reduced. The committee then narrowed its options down to three choices:

Table 10

Grade Configuration Preferences of Committee

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
1 ST K-6/7-9/10-12	1 ST K-9/10-12	1 ST K-9/10-12
2 nd K-9/10-12 or	2 nd K-6/7-9/ 10-12	2 nd K-6/7-12
2 nd K-3/4-9/10-12	3 rd K-6/7-12	
3 rd K-6/7-12		

When asked to chose among these configurations nine people had chosen K-9 and 10-12 while seven had chosen K-6, 7-9 and 10-12.

There still existed no consensus so it was decided to list the rationale for these choices. Thus, the committee re-entered the clarification stage according to Brown. They were:

1. Too large an age span causes problems in respect to course offerings.

2. Age span not a concern, but administration of programs in K-9 would be problematic.
3. Junior high students alone pose too many problems.
4. Too many grades could interfere with accelerated courses.
5. APEF at grades 8-9 have more in common with high school than elementary.
6. The ideal school size concept may not work.
7. Go with two options only.
8. French immersion could be a problem in a K-9 two stream school.
9. There would be more parental involvement in a K-9 school.
10. There would be less transition in a K-9 school.

From this list it was suggested that the pertinent points to keep in mind for decision-making purposes were:

1. APEF
2. Neighborhood schools
3. Modelling
4. Specialists for 7-9

The decision making stage was now confined to satisfy these four issues. The final comments surrounding this suggested that the K-9 school would have to change to ensure specialists were in the school and there would have to be at least two or three streams. No decision was made at this point and the committee agreed to meet for one last time to make a final decision.

The final committee meeting commenced with a discussion of the other options as to why some had been excluded as well as a page by page review of the draft document. There was an acknowledgement that there is no specific grade configuration but that Avalon East School Board's schools must fit within the APEF framework. At this point, the committee suggested that rather than spend time further analyzing the components of the issue again, that it would be better to zero in on the choice itself.

The committee was informed that the task force on the reorganization had provided some additional information regarding the cost implications for grade configuration. Since there were presently in existence sixteen K-6 schools, seven K-8, three K-9 and four 7-9, to move to a K-9 system would impact thirty eight schools. Except for two of the K-6 schools, none of the other elementary schools have labs. The cost factor would be approximately \$65,000 per school. Also, there is no space in most of these schools for lab facilities.

Secondly, the need to re-stream these schools according to the task force may be difficult and in some cases the provision of three streams would be impossible. Therefore, the impact would be less available programming.

Finally, if this configuration was chosen there would be a need to construct industrial art rooms and home economics facilities. This would require expenditures of large amounts of money (\$85,000.00 per school).

To move to a K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 configuration would require less disruption and fewer costs. There are sixteen buildings presently K-6. Ten buildings are K-8 or K-9. Two of the K-5 schools will require one more additional room while one school would not have space. Two buildings that are presently K-4 need additional work and two 6-9 schools would be converted to K-6. There would be a fifth new junior high school. Two of the ten senior high schools are to be closed.

From a neighborhood perspective there was consensus that the K-9 school would allow for students to attend a school closer to their home for a longer period of time. Programming would be stretched, particularly in a K-9 school, where the points were made earlier about the impact on program offerings. The committee, with this information, decided that it would recommend to the board that the grade configuration which it should adopt for its central zone would be the K-6, 7-9, 10-12. However, after making the decision the committee felt that it should make a number of other recommendations related to the proposed grade configuration and the intermediate school level. These points were:

1. that there be proper teacher training for teachers at that level;
2. that the feeder system into the junior high school is tight and does not allow infusion from other schools thus making it a community school;

3. that the board look at the impact that specialty high schools would have on the concept of community schools;
4. that additional support in the form of guidance, lower class sizes be explored for the junior high school;
5. that a task force be set up by the board to investigate the whole issue of intermediate schooling;
6. that administrators within those junior high school schedule classes of one subject at the same time to allow for students with difficulties to be placed in smaller groupings;

The committee felt that with any change in the number of schools that are operated by the board that this money should go back into assisting with the costs associated with these recommendations. It was quickly revealed that this could not be done as the money must be shown to go directly into the school and children who are effected.

Further questions continued to be raised. The feeling by some was that a K-9, 10-12 structure was the most pedagogically sound. The issue of the committee still considering the K-3, 4-9, 10-12 structure also arose. Concern was expressed that this would still result in a large cost as would the K-9 since the need would still remain for schools that have limited laboratory, home economic and industrial art capabilities. When the final tally was completed the vote stood at fourteen members adopting the K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 model. Two felt that the K-9, 10-12 model should exist.

Problem Formation

Throughout the above process there were numerous shifts by the committee as it grappled with the issue of which grade configuration it should recommend to the school board. Perhaps the committee started this process with the opinion that this concept could be quantified to the extent that one single configuration would fit the needs of the board. The literature review, while exposing some trends regarding grade span could not offer consistent empirical evidence as to one best choice. The solution revealed other problems.

The results of the questionnaire pointed to one main preference, however, the choices were questionable since the methodology utilized in identifying the most popular was heavily weighted towards the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 users. Even the defining parameters of the APEF, while substantially reducing the possible options, did not clearly delineate the most suitable configuration. It was an economic consideration that clenched the decision in favor of a preferred grade configuration. Other extraneous points that seemed to provide the necessary impetus for the decision making were political in nature.

The K-9 structure would naturally support a neighborhood school and parental involvement could be sustained over a greater period of time. The transition effect would not be as prevalent since the student would make the change only once and then at an older age when there should be less accompanying stress. Yet when

it is noted that the vast majority of schools within the central zone fit the K-6, 7-9, 10-12 configuration, to alter that would mean that the board would be faced with more disruptions, changes and confrontations then if fewer schools were affected. The implementation of APEF would place more pressure and stress on teachers and administrators to implement the various modules within a K-9 structure. In-servicing would be strained because of reduced central office resources. It could be argued that this would have negative pedagogical implications. This is not to infer that the wrong decision was made but rather to submit that the decision making process was impacted by factors that had not been conceived initially by the committee.

The committee was instituted to study this topic under a terms of reference that did not specify economics or politics. The absence of solid empirical data to support one type of configuration over another did not clarify the situation but instead muddled the waters. This necessitated the movement of the committee to another arena i.e. the new curriculum that was designed around the blocking of information into key stages. Yet again, this in itself did not focus on one grade span thus the need to move to another set of considerations which further defined the issue.

The economic implications provided this framework which lead to the decision making. However, the reticence expressed by a substantial number of the committee members indicated that this

concept was far from well defined. There will be further research and investigation required to bring the issue closer to a more definitive decision and even then it would be naïve to believe that the decision is unquestionable or the debate ended. As the realistic model shows, the decision is not a final decision but rather a step towards further clarification of the problem and a rewording of the problem.

Given the economical, political and social back-drop against which the decision had to be made, the most pragmatic and practical decision was chosen.

As Brodinsky, (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983) says:

Researchers and psychologists had a field day listing educational advantages and disadvantages of this or that plan. Most arguments, even though heavily documented, were either specious or nonsense. The truth was that no educational enhancement but down-to-earth reasons decided the choice of grade alignment. The most practical were the availability, location and size of a school plant. Parent wishes, preferences for school size and operational costs also helped determine which grades would be housed together. (p. 6)

In the absence of solid data those values, goals and desires of numerous stakeholders are continuously in conflict seeking to influence the decision that satisfies their needs. Policy analysis can not and should not be expected to determine a best configuration. More succinctly, White (1993a) (cited in Brown, 1996) says "the task of policy analysis is not to produce that decisive recommendation, but, instead, to contribute toward consensual understanding of actualities, possibilities, and desirabilities. Properly understood, policy analysis does

produce, in Wildavsky's terms, new patterns of social interaction" (p. 26).

Epstein and McIver (1990) postulate that "because grade span is often the result of mechanical and demographic factors, grade span is unlikely to be the main determinant of effective schools for early adolescents" (p. 63).

In the future it may be possible to completely determine the boundaries of what constitutes the factors that determine the best grade configuration. For the present, however, the decision will be made with all the information, but also with a considerable lack of information. Thus the need to return to defining the problem area, clarifying, and redefining.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DRAFT POLICY

According to Ball (1994) :

Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response still must be put together, constructed in context, offset against other expectations. All of this involves creative social action, not robotic reactivity. (p. 19)

In developing a draft policy for determining the grade configuration of a school or school district it is very important that a number of factors be considered prior to the inception of the new grade configuration. From numerous sources such as the literature review, internet search, survey results, findings of other investigations, presentations made to the committee by district and provincial educational specialists, and committee meeting discussions as a participant/observer, the researcher was placed in a position to develop a policy that could be used to assist the school board in determining the steps that it should take in configuring its schools in the future.

In developing the policy, the researcher considered all these pieces of information. The new policy would not affect how the process would work for the present situation. The political, economical, social, and pedagogical frameworks were already in place. Many of the decisions had already been made. It was not a case of starting with a clean slate but rather trying to make decisions within an existing predisposition. While the policy

does not suggest a set configuration for a school or school district it can provide the conditions under which such a decision can be made. As Ball (1994) suggests it can assist in narrowing the options that should be considered so that decision making becomes more focussed. The decision as to which exact grade configuration to implement will remain somewhat subjective and require monitoring and revision over time. In this instance, as in many situations, both inside and outside of education, policy development is that tangled web to which Brown (1996) likens policy making. The policy that is proposed is not static. Revisions are anticipated and expected. The definition of the problem today will bear little resemblance to tomorrow's definition as the contextual factors will either change or they will be prioritized otherwise.

Each of the tasks undertaken provided support for the proposed policy. Ultimately, it suggests a process that the board may use to determine not necessarily what grade configuration would be appropriate for a given school or schools, but rather some of the measures to implement to ensure that conversion to any grade configuration is accomplished with minimal disruption and opposition. It allows for defining and redefining the problem on the basis of those factors which exist at the time. When the policy is applied it can give users options as opposed to one fixed solution.

Before deciding upon an appropriate grade configuration it is important to consider what the literature says about grade configuration and what it does not say. In the domain of grade configuration there rests a high degree of subjectivity. Arguments can be made for or against several variations in each case. Some options may be readily dismissed for any number of practical reasons but not all can be ruled out as easily. For the purposes of this project an extensive research of the literature was done to see what effect grade configuration has on academic achievement and social development. This research examined all the grade configurations in existence in North America.

Authors such as Hawkins et al. (1983) and Hough (1991) feel that grade configuration does not extensively impact academic achievement. They are supported in this claim by others such as Johnson (1982), Wiles and Thomason (1974), Caliste (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983), and Austin (cited in Hawkins et al., 1983). For these authors grade configuration is primarily based on community preference. They maintain that research on the subject is poorly done and that the findings available indicate little or no impact on academic achievement attributable to grade configuration. The general conclusion is that there are other factors which more succinctly effect academic achievement and successful socialization in a school setting. More important than

the actual grade configuration is what happens across the hyphens that Johnson (1982) says will achieve the intended outcomes.

This conflicts with the statements of other authors such as Franklin and Glascock (1996) or Raze (1985) who see certain benefits to having particular grade configurations for different age groups and contend that it can have a positive effect on the student's academic achievement and social development. The Cleveland County and Shelby city Schools Study (1988) also suggested certain benefits from specific grade configurations. Popoff (1987) felt that there were advantages for the young student from a K-3 configuration. For these authors the dynamics created by certain grade configurations can influence a students academic achievement and social development within a school setting.

It is essential that a proper review of existing literature be completed prior to any decision being made. As Johnson (1982) suggests it should be clear from the outset what can or cannot be accomplished in a change in grade configuration. A change in grade configuration may not be the cure for all that ails a school or district. Some may feel that the issue will be resolved from such a review. This is highly unlikely given the variation of configurations and the pros and cons of each. Compound this with the fact that school communities are different and that the neighborhoods in which they are found may be different and this may lead to varied conclusions.

The fact that many authors attributed the lack of information on grade configuration to poor empirical evidence, or lack of findings as suggested by Hawkins et al. (1983), solidifies the need for further study and investigation. While most of the research that has been done is suspect this should not deter or limit the debate on this topic. Nor does it justify ignoring what has been found. Perhaps the research will become more valid over time and form an integral part of the literature review. It is essential that before the process to realign a specific school or school district is entertained that information gathering is done. The different combinations of grades each have certain advantages and disadvantages and may be situational specific.

To carry out a change in the configuration of a school or district without knowledge of what the literature says is folly as it provides important information and also provides an understanding of this blurred topic itself.

In the six months that the Committee met, following the process as described in the previous chapters, seven policy statements were developed.

Policy Statements

Policy Statements - Level 1

An updated research of the most recent literature should be completed to determine whether or not there are grade configurations which are more appropriate than others and to

ascertain the conditions that best facilitate the grade configuration.

For some, the single most important part of any review process is the involvement of the stakeholders. Within committee discussions it was pointed out that various avenues had been explored to obtain input from the stakeholders. This included meeting with school councils, parents, staffs, and other agencies during the task force phase of the reorganization. As admitted by the task force designers, grade configuration was not highlighted during these meetings since the issue of school closures overshadowed it. Much of the attention was spent defending the need to close schools and economize the system. It was assumed that school closures were inevitable. The basis for which schools were designated for closure was primarily the facility's overall physical condition and the costs associated with renovating existing schools. The issue of the impact of the grade configuration of the schools was secondary as pointed out by the task force when it met with the committee. In determining grade reconfiguration, regardless of the reason for it, the process must be transparent and inclusive from the beginning.

Both Johnson (1982) and DiGeronimo (cited in Lake, 1985) stress the necessity of ensuring that all stakeholders are brought into the debate. Feld et al. (1980) speak to the necessity of having the community and neighborhood involved in such decisions. The range of those involved is expansive but it

is imperative that this occur since to eliminate any group which is directly or indirectly associated will only provide opportunity for distraction and cynicism. This can be easily avoided by their inclusion.

This notion was further solidified during the committee discussions as it was suggested that each school and school council should be heard in this process. Even the committee, after hearing the presentation from the task force, questioned whether or not the decision had already been taken and that this exercise of investigating grade configuration was necessary.

It is critically important that the stakeholders are not only heard but that they are being listened to. There are many ways to do this. Holding meetings, focus groups, and surveys are but some of the methods to employ. But, as Molitor and Dentler (1982) suggest it is not enough to just carry out these practices, it is also crucial that it not be rushed. It must be comprehensive and there must be reasonable opportunity to change the direction of the proposed change. This process must seek a buy-in by all participants and since various stakeholders see the issues through different lenses then it is incumbent that a myriad of concerns be addressed. As shown by the survey results there were differences in respondent's answers. This was particularly true for those given by parents and students in comparison to those given by teachers and administrators. Those items which are of importance to administrators may not be a

priority for parents. Students may have different concerns from teachers. The community may see its role very differently and have other expectations. Thus, it is necessary to plan well in advance, view the issues from all perspectives, design the plan so as to expect changes in it and be prepared to continuously modify.

Brown's model (1996) of policy development would support this mode of operation. Redefining the problem and seeking clarification are cornerstones of a successful process. The committee in its own deliberations felt that what was being recommended would change in the future. Had the issues that were before it different, then the decision itself may have also been different. If the Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundations had been structured along other lines, then possibly the configuration would have not been the one recommended. If proper information regarding the benefits of one grade configuration as opposed to another had been presented to all the stakeholders then possibly survey results would have been different.

As Hirsch (cited in OECD Conference in the Netherlands, 1995) suggests it is important to take into consideration those views which go beyond pedagogy since those other arenas which influence education will be forgotten. These decisions cannot be rushed and they should be planned coherently well in advance of the inception of the concept. In this case, the committee on grade configuration was formed over a year after the task force had

begun its work. Perhaps, had it been initiated earlier it could have assisted the board and the stakeholders more in arriving at decisions or in understanding the decisions that were taken.

Policy Statements - Level 2

The process should be gradual, open and transparent. It should welcome input from interested parties and entertain modification where possible. Stakeholders must feel that not only do they have input but that they are also affecting the process.

To make a totally informed decision a proper analysis of each school should have been done. As Feld et al. (1980) suggest it is the local or school level that should be focussed upon not just the district level. While the district provided detailed information on the suitability of the infrastructure for each school it did not provide a similar analysis of programming options or academic achievement of individual schools. The bricks and mortar issues were addressed as were the economic feasibility but all the pedagogical implications were not. An in-depth comprehensive profile of each school was not done. Maintaining community schools was an issue that even the committee had difficulties resolving. Eventually it settled this question by suggesting that minimally, K-6 schools should be maintained as neighborhood schools, and where feasible intermediate schools.

Committee members throughout the discussions spoke of personal experiences where schools with dissimilar grade

configurations provided the type of education that they expected for their child. A proper profile of a school would give not only the academic picture but also many of the intangibles that often make a good school. These are components such as the ability of students to get along with each other, teacher involvement in extracurricular events, parental and community involvement. It is what Johnson (1982) refers to as what happens across the arrows and not necessarily the actual grade configuration that counts. Many schools, regardless of their configuration, have reputations that place them in a class all by themselves. As Hough (1991) points out it is the educational program that can be delivered which should drive the program and not the other influences such as economics, personal preference and community wishes.

Both the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1998) and DiGeronimo (cited in Lake, 1985) speak to this necessity. Addressing local school concerns are crucial to success. By providing answers to even the simplest questions it is possible to avoid confusion and in some cases confrontation. The types of issues that these authors address at the local level are important to the process and as they suggest, it is equally important that the school administration assist in bringing about this change.

Policy Statements - Level 3

A profile of the school(s) to be configured should be undertaken to identify what strengths and weaknesses exist within

the present school(s) and what additional positive features will be provided by the new configuration once it is decided upon. This would entail ensuring that any special needs groups are accommodated within the new structure.

A limited survey of those stakeholders who will be directly impacted by decisions to change the grade configuration of the district's schools was undertaken by the district committee. (Appendix B) The survey was administered randomly to students, parents, teachers and administrators in the district. Surveying stakeholders may provide information that otherwise would have been omitted. The anecdotal section allowed respondents to provide information that otherwise would be unavailable. Knowledge of not only what is expected by the stakeholder but also what is not acceptable would be very valuable in avoiding conflict. A number of issues such as those suggested by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Resources (1996) could be addressed very effectively by the use of a survey. It may be that the local population do not see all these considerations as priorities thus eliminating those which are not.

In this case, the surveys provided first hand knowledge regarding the preferences of representatives of all the direct stakeholders in this issue. It was the backdrop upon which many of the recommendations were built. The answers identified not only the concerns of the stakeholders but also prepared the school board for the type of opposition, if any, that could arise

to the school closures and what the problems surrounding these decisions could be. The surveys did not show a majority support for one grade configuration. This position is supported by the research review.

Surveys are instruments which give an indication of the feelings of those being surveyed at that particular time. It is important that they be carefully designed and scientifically administered and interpreted. When done properly surveys can provide a huge amount of information that can be used in direction setting. It is what Brown (1996) would suggest as the clarification of the problem area. The survey that was done in this study did not meet this criteria nor was it intended to do so. It was simply meant to provide the committee with a quick response as to what grade configuration did respondents prefer. A properly designed and administered survey should discover not only preference but also what the respondents expect the change to provide.

Again, it is through such a process that those who would be effected can have direct input. The Halton Board of Education in Ontario carried out numerous activities to obtain information from stakeholders. Surveying stakeholders was one of their tools for getting this information.

Policy Statements - Level 4

A survey of all those directly affected should be carried out with the intention of identifying the strengths as well as

the weakness of the present configuration. Such a survey should be done to clearly delineate the types of relationships that exist between the needs of the child and the ability of the system to provide for those needs.

A more precise analysis of the expectations of the stakeholders coupled with an appropriate and detailed assessment of the impact that the reconfiguration would have on each school would have been beneficial information in the decision making process. Each individual school needs to be investigated and assessed as to how the change will benefit students and what will be lost. This is supported by Molitor and Dentler (1982) who content that the process must be a careful and adaptable one. Most importantly is that the stakeholders must be involved in each stage of the process and must have reasonable opportunity to provide input and cause change.

The process that is adopted to move to a change in grade configuration is as pivotal to the success of the exercise as the change itself. Throughout the committee discussions and particularly during the decision making stage it was obvious that all participants required time to feel comfortable with the actual decision. The process that the committee adopted, while somewhat rushed, was a constructive one. As Brown's model suggests it is to be expected that the process will entail entering into and re-entering many times before a proper analysis

of the problem area is identified. Therefore, it would be advantageous for any school or district to proceed similarly.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that a process of providing information to stakeholders and seeking their feedback is essential to developing a recognition of the need for change. Johnson (1982) supports such an iterative process of decision making in policy development suggesting that it should allow for intensive research, and several cycles of stakeholder meetings, and modification before final decisions are made. After refinement, the policy is implemented with review and evaluation to determine success and point out the need for any further modifications.

Policy Statements - Level 5

Information meetings should be held to update all stakeholders on the progress, at specific intervals, to alleviate any anxiety that may be produced by the introduction of a new order. These intervals could be divided into stages:

1. Pre-conceptual stage: It is here where the concept of reconfiguration would be introduced. Care should be taken to ensure that the pros and cons of the suggested as well as the alternate configurations are presented. A degree of consensus making should be sought at this point. Where possible fears should be allayed. This stage should be very flexible and non-threatening.

2. Exploration stage: Surveys, focus groups, written submissions, public hearings should be held to hear the concerns, questions and references of those involved. Issues such as transportation, class size, transition points, articulation processes, curriculum layout, counseling services, school design, etc. should be discussed. It is important that each concern is addressed constructively.

3. Reporting stage: At this point a meeting should be held to report the result of any findings from the above stage. The report should provide an overview of related literature and a discussion of the curriculum impacts, instructional concerns, cost implications, community impacts, and facility changes. Opportunity for modification should still exist.

4. Pre-Decision-making Strategy Stage: Perhaps the most important stage is the implementation of any proposed change. There must be a clearly defined path with further opportunity for modification. This should show all interested parties the how, when, what, where and why once the decision is made. It should also indicate any new expectations of the groups directly affected. Otherwise the change is superficial and the status quo maintained but perceived as new.

5. Decision making stage: The decision once taken should be flexible enough to accommodate peculiarities within a given school or community; however, the alteration of the decision should be based on exceptional circumstances only. By this point

it should be clear, even to the detractors that the change is necessary.

6. Post decision/modification stage: once implemented the decision should be carefully evaluated to ensure that the proposed program is implemented as intended and that any problems with the implementation are expeditiously rectified.

There is some evidence to suggest that transition periods do affect academic achievement and can have detrimental effects on the social development of the child (Erb, 1982). Studies such as those by Summers and Wolfe (1976), Feld et al. (1980) and Blyth et al. (1978), for example, demonstrate that those students who attend the same school for longer periods of time have advantages over those who change schools earlier in life. The survey results showed that some of the respondents felt that there were certain benefits to remaining in the same school for longer periods of time and that students reported a reduction in academic achievement going into a new school.

Policy Statements - Level 6

Transition situations should be minimal Wherever possible the transition stages should occur at intervals that are practicable and least threatening. Wherever possible and educationally beneficial the concept of a school within a school should be adopted to provide a longer period of time within the same school as well as to provide longer period of attachment to the community.

Allen (1990) pointed to the need for definitive articulation processes to minimize the negative effects of moving from one building to the next. The committee itself had difficulty determining how to deal with this issue but were convinced that any measure taken to familiarize the student with the new school and to ensure that all parties including administrators and teachers practiced certain skills to ease the uncertainty for students would make the change less disruptive.

DiGeronimo (cited in Lake, 1985), Feld et al. (1980) and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Resources all speak to the issue of making the break easier by being attentive to certain practices, especially at the local level. The instituting of mentors, parental involvement, sharing of facilities and teachers are some of the actions that can be taken.

The committee was very sensitive to the need to have certain practices in place to ensure that the transitions were as smooth as possible. These included ensuring that teachers with the appropriate skills, particularly at the intermediate level, were assigned to those areas. Having a greater degree of cooperation and communication between the affected schools was also mentioned. This would ensure that all students, but particularly those with special needs, were known to the receiving school. The committee in making its recommendations was also cognizant of maintaining neighborhood schools for as lengthy a period as

possible therefore reducing the changing situations that a student may face.

Policy Statements - Level 7

If transition grades exist then articulation exercises should be instituted in all schools affected. These articulation processes should contain:

1. School visitations by students, teachers and parents to the school to which the student is moving well in advance of that move.
2. If possible, sharing of facilities, teachers, extra and co-curricular activities should take place between the schools.
3. In situations where there are catchment areas, every effort should be taken to ensure that the same feeder schools feed into the same higher grade school and any overlap with other schools outside the catchment area is minimized.
4. Parental involvement should be encouraged and maintained throughout the student's school life. This is of particular importance during the transition years as it can ease the uncertainty associated with this period. This may be accomplished by having the student and parent sign "contracts of involvement" in the transitionary school.
5. Wherever practicable there should be a regular transfer of teachers between the schools within the catchment areas. This would be predicated on the teacher having the appropriate academic qualifications.

6. Regular meetings should be held between the administrators and teachers of the complementing schools. Such meetings should concentrate on the teaching methodologies employed by each school, an overview of the curriculum expectations, the academic standards within the participating schools, identification of students with special needs, and a sharing of ideas by teachers within the schools. The need to develop overlapping methodologies is important here to minimize any negative impact.
7. Each student entering a new school should be assigned an older student mentor. The focus here would be to make the adjustment easier as well as to create a sense of responsibility in the mentoring student.
8. Special monitoring of the academic progress of each transition student should take place during the transition year. This may involve additional parent meetings, early identification and grouping of those students experiencing difficulties into smaller classes and more individual attention.
9. Additional counseling and guidance services should be provided to students in the transition years.
10. Wherever possible, opportunities for integration of older and younger students should take place. This may be accomplished by instituting house systems in schools, creating across the age groupings sections of some subjects where classes can be integrated.

11. Reduce the number of teacher contacts that students have during the transition year.

12. Develop co-curricular and extra-curricular programs which encourage integration of the age groupings.

Conclusion

From this research and the findings of the investigation, it was possible to develop the draft policy for the Avalon East School Board (Appendix F) regarding criteria which can be utilized in determining the most appropriate grade span configuration for its schools. The draft policy was flexible enough to accommodate the small rural needs of the board yet at the same time addressed urban requirements as well.

In summary, the reconfiguring of a school or school system should only be done if it is demonstrated that:

1. The new arrangement will be beneficial to the educational and social well being of the student.
2. There is a well documented need for such an alternate arrangement.
3. The necessary funding is available to carry out the reconfiguration to the extent that there is an improvement in the quality of educational opportunity afforded the student.
4. The community school concept can either be maintained or developed within the reconfiguration.
5. The school staff are prepared to deal positively with the change and work to make the change an unconditional success.

6. Curriculum development, implementation and instructional methodology is benefited by the new grade level arrangement.

By carrying out these practices and following the broad guidelines of the policy, it is anticipated that the changes will have a greater chance of success. As Boyd (1988) suggests it is important to understand the theory surrounding such issues as well as the on the ground implications of change. It is through policy analysis that organizations such as schools and school boards can do this. Boyd (1988) says "...policy analysis has the potential (a) to bridge the perennial gap between theory and practice and (b) to link organizational and administrative processes to organizational outcomes..." (p. 518).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pros and Cons of Various Grade Configurations

Appendix A

Pros and Cons of Various Grade Configurations

Grades K-3, 4-6

<u>FOR</u>	<u>AGAINST</u>
1. Larger pool of same age group to draw from for instructional grouping purposes.	1. Emphasizes curricular differences between grades 3 and 4.
2. Would provide for greater specialization-focus of teaching and administration skills.	2. Role modeling by intermediate children for primary children would be eliminated.
3. Minimize spread of unrest from intermediate children to primary children.	3. Eliminate the opportunity for cross grouping from lower levels to higher levels and vice versa.
4. There is a shorter time span between planned "school changes" for each student.	4. Decreases communication among past, present and future teachers of the students.
5. More efficient staffing ratios because of larger pool of students at a grade level.	5. Increased transition, articulation, coordination problems.
	6. Diminishes the opportunity for siblings and neighbourhood friends to ride and to walk to school together.
	7. An increase in transportation costs is likely.
	8. Loss of neighbourhood schools.

6-6 (Grades K-6, 7-12)

FOR

1. Provides secondary program continuity for a longer period of time than K-8, 9-12.
2. Provides a broader range of courses for younger students.
3. Provides earlier competition and break-away from the elementary school.
4. Provides more mature 12-14 year olds an opportunity for interaction with older students.
5. Provides a subject-centered program in the secondary school.
6. Provides specialists to teach courses in the secondary schools.

AGAINST

1. Forces earlier break from elementary schooling than K-8, 9-12.
2. Pressures students between 11-14 to place their childhood behind them.
3. Creates larger secondary schools.
4. Creates constant interaction between young adults and early adolescents.
5. Teachers are more subject matter than child oriented.
6. Departmentalization means decreased flexibility in exploring various subject areas.

8-4 (Grades K-8, 9-12)

FOR

1. Keeps students in the elementary school environment longer.
2. More emphasis could (perhaps would) be given to the tradition so-called fundamentals; the teacher would be with the student for the entire day or most of it and thus could provide better instruction and

AGAINST

1. The curriculum for grades seven and eight might in some cases be much narrower (without or with much less adequate libraries, shops, science rooms, physical education facilities, homemaking rooms, arts and crafts rooms, guidance provisions) and thus would provide for the needs of these students markedly less

guidance.

3. The gap between elementary and secondary education would come later when the student would be better prepared to cope with it.
4. Articulation between elementary and secondary education would be more easily achieved since there would be only one bridge to effect rather than two.
5. "Growing up" socially would occur later.
6. Home-school cooperation might be more easily attained.
7. School would probably be nearer the home of the student and transportation problems might conceivably be decreased in grades seven and eight.

adequately.

2. If an enriched program were attempted, it might under certain circumstances and in a number of schools, call for considerable duplication of special rooms and equipment which would not be utilized fully.
3. The program of activities for grades seven and eight might tend to be very limited and inadequate for students in grades seven and eight.
4. Securing of elementary teachers for grades seven and eight would be difficult.
5. The opportunities of students in grades kindergarten to six might be seriously interfered with by making provisions for the older students; to provide equivalent opportunity, both capital outlay and current expense costs would tend to be considerably greater.
6. Forces early adolescents to interact continually with pre-adolescents.
7. Forces students to make a rapid adjustment from elementary to high school.
8. The gap between elementary and secondary education might easily be so wide that it would be extremely difficult to bridge.
9. Adequate guidance and necessary experience to

facilitate bridging the gap to secondary education would be more difficult to provide.

10. Denies easily adolescents a school of their own and a broader curriculum offering appropriate to their needs.

6-3-3 (Grades K-6, 7-9, 10-12)

FOR

1. Longer stay in one school facilitates better relationships for students and parents.
2. Fifth and sixth grade students provide appropriate role models for younger students.
3. Provides interaction among greater range of age levels.
4. Maintains neighbourhood school concept.
5. Gives early adolescents and young adults schools of their own.
6. Provides for gradual change from self-contained classrooms to complete departmentalization.
7. Is able to offer a counseling program for 7-8-9. For 7-8-9 a better, more appropriate organization of academic studies can be developed.
8. Leadership opportunities are available to 9th graders as opposed to being at the "bottom of the ladder."
9. 6-3-3 enables the school to develop a program of extra-curricular activities and to provide better experiences and leadership for early adolescents.

AGAINST

1. Ninth graders are physically different than seventh and eighth graders. Two thirds of the girls and one third of the boys in the eighth grade have gone through puberty. All, or almost all, of the ninth grade boys and girls have gone through puberty.
2. A ninth grader is too sophisticated for seventh and eighth grade children who want to imitate ninth graders and grow up too fast.
3. Pressures students between 12 and 14 to place their childhood behind them.
4. Possibilities for varied programs in seventh and eighth grades are hedged in by ninth grade Carnegie unit scheduling requirements.
5. Specialized curriculum offerings tend to make teachers more subject matter conscious than child conscious.
6. When ninth grade is separated from 10-11-12, certain courses and equipment must be dropped.
7. Limited course offerings, especially for the academically talented and gifted.

10. Many ninth graders are not able to accept the social pressure placed on them in a 9-12 school.
11. The academic pressure caused by teachers who are accustomed to working with senior high students and the competition of advanced senior high students is too much for ninth graders.
12. This form of organization is well accepted. Staying with the status quo will not cause much upset.
8. 10-12 have fewer course offerings because of lack of ninth grade.
9. Sometimes a junior high school is a "little high school" and not a school with its own identity; it has "junior" status.
10. Some parents and students feel that a junior high school "doesn't count", or at least not the 7th and 8th grades.
11. Some sixth grade students can be negative role models for younger students.

5-3-4 (Grades K-5, 6-8, 9-12)

FOR

1. Research findings consistently show that today youngsters enter adolescence a year earlier than they did 50 years ago due to better nutrition and improved socioeconomic conditions.
2. Student ages in a 6-7-8 school more nearly parallel the period of human growth and development between childhood and adolescence between ages 11 and 13.
3. Research indicates children are in pubescence between ages 11 and 13.
4. Groups students who are more alike than either elementary or secondary students.
5. This age group needs personal attention which they do not receive

AGAINST

1. Sixth graders are better off in the protective environment of an elementary school.
2. Sixth graders would lose the benefit of an elementary school program.
3. Sixth graders not available for safety patrol, student council and other leadership roles.
4. Sixth graders are too young to be pushed very hard academically or socially.
5. The elementary school challenge of working with children at the sixth grade level would be missing.
6. 6-7-8 programs often are very similar, or identical to 7-8-9 programs.
7. There might be a scaling

- sufficiently in any of the other organizations. They are at an awkward stage and need to be together with excellent teacher personnel.
6. They are at an academic age where they need reinforcement and extension of skills through application.
 7. Exposes students to various areas of specialization at an earlier age on an exploratory basis. Specialist would be available to help sixth graders branch out easier than they can in an elementary school.
 8. Provides sixth graders the opportunity to use specialized facilities such as science labs, home economics rooms and industrial arts shops.
 9. Sixth graders need greater stimulation and departmentalization of teaching and special facilities and equipment, e.g. shops and labs, to advance according to their ability.
 10. Facilitates greater flexibility in grouping children for instructional purposes.
 11. Provides orderly transition from elementary methods and materials to secondary methods, materials and complete departmentalization.
 12. Can provide a school with an identity of its own which enhances students sense of belonging.
 13. Reduce emphasis on parties, dances and competitive athletics.
- down of standards in a K-5 school (especially in chorus, band and physical education) because the pace setting sixth grade is absent.
8. This may decrease the proportion of male teachers in fourth and fifth grades.
 9. Music program might have to be extended into third grade in order to have a three year program in building. Many third graders are too young for music.
 10. Removes the leadership role carried by ninth grade students.
 11. The difference between age 14 (ninth grade) and age 18 (twelfth grade) is too great and makes it very difficult for ninth graders to adjust to the new school.
 12. Ninth graders are too young, immature to be placed with senior high students.
 13. Administrative techniques and procedures would have to change.

- 14.Children can have a fresh start in a new school one year earlier. That is, they can detach themselves from old labels, make new friends, etc,
- 15.With ninth graders in a separate building, the "growing-up" process will be slowed down.
- 16.The leadership advantages we give to sixth graders could be given to fifth graders.
- 17.Removes the restraint of organizing part of the school to meet high school graduation requirements (Carnegie units).
- 18.A transitional school should have at least three grade levels in it to allow sufficient time for the students to develop an identity with the building and for the faculty to know and work with the students.
- 19.Today's ninth graders are more mature, sophisticated than those of 50 years ago, when the junior high school was created, and can handle and profit the high school and extracurricular pressures.
- 20.The end of eighth grade is a natural break. Many ninth graders are mature enough to fit in and profit by the high school program. They feel like and want to be senior high school students.
- 21.Many ninth graders need a greater variety of course offerings than is available in a junior high school.
- 22.Provides opportunity for advanced ninth graders to take higher level courses without traveling to another school.

23. Affords opportunities for a broader curriculum offering in the high school.
24. Facilitates continuing and articulation of educational programs 9-12 in all areas, curricular and co-curricular including athletics.
25. Places the entire high school program and Carnegie unit requirements in one building.
26. Earlier referrals can be made for remediation or for acceleration.
27. Facilitates more efficient use of staff.
28. College admission and state high school graduation requirements are based upon the assumption of a 9-12 program.

Appendix B**Survey Examples of Teacher, Student, Parent, Administrator**

Appendix B

Survey Examples of Teacher, Student, Parent, Administrator

Student Survey

The following are questions about you, your school and your feelings towards your school. Please answer all the questions.

Grade _____ Male/Female _____ Age _____

If you have attended other schools list the grades that existed in those school _____

When you moved from one school to the next, did your marks decrease, increase or remain the same? _____

List any grade(s) that you repeated since you began school _____

What grade are you in now? _____

If you could pick the grades that would exist in each school as you move from Kindergarten to grade twelve what would it be?

(Check X your choice(s). Note: Each grade level can only appear once. Example: You cannot pick K-8 and then 6-9 since grades 6, 7 and 8 already appear in the K-8 school.)

K-3 K-4 K-5 K-6 K-8 K-9 K-12

4-6 5-8 6-9 7-9 7-12 9-12 10-12

Briefly give two main reasons for picking this design. _____

In answering the questions below use the following scale and

- circle one answer only:
- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 1 | -strongly disagree | (SD) |
| 2 | -disagree | (D) |
| 3 | -no opinion | (N) |
| 4 | -agree | (A) |
| 5 | -strongly agree | (SA) |

	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>
Example: The word "at" has two letters.	1	2	3	4	5
1. This school has the right number of grades in it.	1	2	3	3	5
2. Older and younger students get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is safer being in the highest grade in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
(Students already in the highest grade indicate how you would have felt a year or two ago when you were not in the highest grade in the school.)	1	2	3	4	5
4. My marks dropped when I first entered this school. (For those just entering the school, use your marks at midterm to answer this question. For those who have been in just one school, please ignore this question.)	1	2	3	4	5
5. The younger students in this school learn good things from the older students. (For					

- students who are the youngest in your
present school think back to when you were
the oldest in another school.) 1 2 3 4 5
6. There are enough different academic
programs or courses offered in this school. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Students in this school don't really care
too much about their school work. 1 2 3 4 5
8. All students in this school are treated the
same regardless of the grade they are in. 1 2 3 4 5
9. Teachers know the students in this school
and usually have a good relationship with
them. 1 2 3 4 5
10. It doesn't bother me if I have teachers
teaching me different subjects. 1 2 3 4 5

Other Comments: _____

Parent Survey

The following are some questions and statements regarding your opinion as to how you believe schools should be organized so as to provide the best possible educational opportunities for your child(ren). **Please answer all the questions.**

Your sex: _____ Age group: (20-30, 30-40 etc) _____

In moving from Kindergarten to level three (grade 12), what do you believe is the best design for schools. (Check X your choice(s). Each grade can only appear once i.e. you could not choose K-8 and 7-9 as there is an overlap of grades 7 & 8).

K-3 K-4 K-5 K-6 K-8 K-9 K-12

4-6 5-8 6-9 7-9 7-12 9-12 10-12

Briefly give two reasons for selecting this design. _____

How many children do you presently have in school? _____

In what grades are they enrolled? _____

What grade levels exist in the school(s) which your child(ren) presently attend _____

In answering the questions below use the following scale and

circle one answer only:	1	-strongly disagree	(SD)
	2	-disagree	(D)
	3	-no opinion	(N)
	4	-agree	(A)
	5	-strongly agree	(SA)

	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>
Example: The word "at" has two letters.	1	2	3	4	5
1. The number of different grades in my child's school is satisfactory.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Older and younger students in my child's school seem to get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think it is safer being an older child in the highest grade in my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My child's marks dropped when s/he first entered this school. (If your child just entered this school use his/her marks at midterm to answer this question. Ignore if your child has attended only one school.)	1	2	3	4	5
5. The younger students in my child's school learn good things from older students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There are enough different academic programs or courses being offered by the school.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students don't seem to really care too much about their school work.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Students in my child's school seem to be treated the same regardless of the grade in which they are enrolled.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My child knows the teachers well and seems					

to have a good relationship with them.

1 2 3 4 5

10. My child is taught too many different

subjects by too many different teachers.

1 2 3 4 5

Other Comments:

Teacher's Survey

The following are some questions and statements regarding grade level configurations in schools. Please complete this survey based on the school in which you presently teach. Other comments may be added below.

Sex: _____ Age Grouping: (20-30, 30-40 etc): _____

Grade configuration of your school: _____

Number of years teaching: _____

What do you believe is the best design for schools. (Check X your choice(s). You can use each grade only once in making your best decision i.e. you cannot use K-8 and 7-9 since there is an overlap of grades 7 & 8.)

K-3 K-4 K-5 K-6 K-8 K-9 K-12

4-6 5-8 6-9 7-9 9-12 10-12

Briefly give two main reasons for selecting this design. _____

For the following statements please use the following scale and

circle one answer only:	1	-strongly disagree	(SD)
	2	-disagree	(D)
	3	-no opinion	(N)
	4	-agree	(A)
	5	-strongly agree	(SA)

	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SA</u>
1. I believe that this school has an	1	2	3	4	5
2. The older and younger students in this school seem to get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students in the highest grade in this school seem to be safer than those in the lower grades.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Marks usually drop when a student first enters this school.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I believe that the younger students in this school learn positive things from the older students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There are enough academic program offerings or courses for students in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel that having several different teachers for different subjects is not disadvantageous for students at the age levels in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Teachers in this school know their students well and usually have a good relationship with them.	1	2	3	4	5
9. All students in this school are treated the same regardless of their grade level.	1	2	3	4	5

10.Students in this school don't really care
too much about their school work.

1 2 3 4 5

Additional Comments: _____

Administrator's Survey

The following are some statements and questions on grade configuration in schools. Please base your answers on the school in which you are presently an administrator. There is room for additional comments below.

Sex: _____ Age Grouping: (20-30, 30-40 etc) _____

Grade configuration of your school: _____ Number of years as an administrator in your school: _____

If you have taught/administered in different grade configured schools, please list the configurations: _____

Number of years teaching: _____ What do you believe is the best design for schools? (Check X your choice(s). You can use each grade only once in making your decision i.e. you cannot choose K-8 and 7-9 since grades 7&8 overlap.)

K-3 K-4 K-5 K-6 K-8 K-9 K-12

4-6 5-8 6-9 7-9 9-12 10-12

Briefly give two main reasons for selecting this design. _____

For this survey please use the following scale and circle one answer only:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 1 | -strongly disagree | (SD) |
| 2 | -disagree | (D) |
| 3 | -no opinion | (N) |
| 4 | -agree | (A) |
| 5 | -strongly agree | (SA) |

	<u>SD</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>SA</u>
Example: The word "at" has two letters.	1	2	3	4	5
1. I believe that this school has the appropriate number of grade levels.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The older and younger students in this school seem to get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students in the highest grade in this school seem to be safer than those in the lower grades.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Marks usually drop when a student first enters this school.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The younger students in this school learn positive things from the older students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There are enough different program offerings or courses for the students in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students in this school don't really care too much about their school work.	1	2	3	4	5

8. All students in this school are treated the
same regardless of their grade level. 1 2 3 4 5
9. Teachers in this school know their students
well and form good relationships with them. 1 2 3 4 5
- 10 It doesn't really matter if students at the
grade levels in this school have several
different teachers for different subjects. 1 2 3 4 5

Additional Comments: _____

Appendix C
Proposed instructions

Appendix C

Proposed Instructions

Letter to principals from Assistant Director of Programs, Avalon East School Board

TO: Principals
FROM: Assistant Director, Programs
RE: Survey
DATE: May 8, 1998

The Grade Configuration Committee has been meeting since March. We hope to have a recommendation to the Board by June. Before Easter a number of schools sent along some teacher observations which were compiled for the Committee.

At this time, we are requesting one more piece of information from you, which we feel will assist us in our deliberations.

You will find enclosed four types of questionnaires, one for the Administrator, one for any two parents, one each for two teachers on your staff, and one each for any three students in your school. While I realize times are hectic, it would assist us greatly if these were **returned by May 21**. Please direct them to either Martha Sanger's attention or mine.

One of our Committee members, Keith Coombs, is currently researching the topic of Grade Configuration for a university course. The Committee will provide the results of these questionnaires to Keith for him to incorporate into his course. You will note the questionnaires do not have

any identifying information of names, etc., so there is no issue of confidentiality in our sharing this information with Keith.

We appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Thank you.

Assistant Director, Programs

Revised Instructions

Inside this envelope you will find several surveys on grade configuration. We would ask you that you distribute these to the appropriate students, parents, teachers or administrator. Below you will have instructions for selecting from each group.

Students: Each student has been given a number which may or may not coincide with the registration system in your school. You may have a student survey for students #'s 78, 254 and 567. If these #'s are similar to the registration number for students in your school then you can simply distribute the surveys to those students. OR if there is no such system in your school then you can simply use an alphabetical listing and choose the 78th, 298th and 567th student. OR if you have three grade levels i.e. 7,8,9 in your school, with six classes at each level, with 35 students

in every class, then the 78th student would be situated in the third grade seven class. Then using the register of that class you would pick the 28th student on the register of that class.

OR you may have another system which randomly applies these numbers. Teachers may assist a student to complete their survey if they have trouble with it.

Please do not administer this survey to any student under grade three level. For those surveys which are slated to go to students in grade kindergarten, one or two please randomly select students above these levels to complete the survey.

Parents: For those surveys that go to the parents simply use the same system you used above to choose a student and have him/her take the survey to any parent/guardian in their home to have it completed.

Teachers: Each teacher has also been assigned a number. Again using any list, such as a staff list, assign the teachers in your school a number and then distribute these surveys according to this list.

Administrators: Most envelopes contain a survey for one or both of the administrators in a school. If either or both are also selected according to the teacher's survey then they should pass

this survey on to the teacher whose name appears next to theirs.
(ascending order)

Note: When the surveys are completed they should be returned to you and then returned to the Avalon East School Board c/o Martha Sanger. We would ask that you have them returned no later than Friday, May 15th. Thank you for your time and cooperation in this matter.

Appendix D
Sample Letter for Respondents
Grade Configuration Survey

Appendix D**Sample Letter for Respondents****Grade Configuration Survey**

The attached survey is being distributed by the Avalon East School Board to assist the grade configuration committee in its efforts to find a suitable grade level arrangement for its schools. We are interested in knowing your opinion regarding the number of grade levels that you believe should exist in a particular school in going from kindergarten to level three. Involvement in this survey is voluntary and the information submitted by you will be kept confidential. The final report will attempt to incorporate your concerns where possible. This is one piece of information that will be used to determine appropriate grade configuration for the schools within our district. The committee will be making a series of recommendations to the school board which will then decide the final outcome regarding this issue.

In anticipation of your cooperation I would like to thank you for assisting the grade configuration in its efforts. We hope to make decisions that will further enhance and improve the quality of education that is offered our students.

Sincerely,

Assistant Director of Programs

Avalon East School Board

NOTE: Since we are anxious to receive your input would you please ensure that the survey is returned to the principal of your school or your child's school no later than Friday, May 15th.

Thank you.

Appendix E
Revised Instructions for Distribution of Survey

Appendix E
Revised Instructions for Distribution of Survey

Inside this envelope you will find four different types of surveys on grade configuration, a covering letter for each participant from the Board, and a permission form to be signed by the parent or guardian of each student participant. There is one type of survey for each of the four categories: students, parents, teachers, and administrators. We would ask that you randomly select three students, two parents, two teachers, and one administrator to complete the survey. Below we have suggested some possible ways that may assist you in randomly selecting individuals to complete the survey. Once the surveys are completed they should be returned to you and then returned to the Avalon East School Board (Phone: 758-2342).

Students: (3) If you have your students' names computerized then you may have a program that can randomly select them for you, OR, if there is no such system in your school then you can simply use an alphabetical listing of the students in your school and without looking just select three names, OR, if you have three grades in your school, with six classes at each level, with 35 students in each class, then randomly pick one student from each grade to complete the survey, OR, you may have another system, which can randomly select the students. Teachers may assist a student to complete their survey if they have trouble with it or

the student may opt to take it home and complete it. In any event, the student must have his/her parent or guardian sign a consent form allowing them to complete the survey. These consent forms along with the completed surveys must be returned to you and the School Board.

Parents: (2) For those surveys that go to the parents use the same system you used above to choose a student and have that student take the survey to either parent/guardian to have it completed and returned.

Teachers: (2) The easiest method here would be to take a staff list and randomly select the two teachers to complete the survey. This can be done by simply running your finger along the staff list and stopping at any unassigned point.

Administrators: (1) In this case, assuming there are two administrators, you can flip a coin.

Note: Please ensure that the completed surveys along with the student permission forms are returned to Board Office no later than Thursday, May 21st. Thank you for your time and cooperation in this matter.

NOTE: FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE 4 AND ABOVE.

Appendix F
Draft Policy

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Appendix F

Draft Policy

Policy Statements - Level 1

An updated research of the most recent literature should be completed to determine whether or not there are grade configurations which are more appropriate than others and to ascertain the conditions that best facilitate the grade configuration.

Policy Statements - Level 2

The process should involve all those directly affected by the change i.e. students, teachers, administrators, parents, trustees, school board personnel, and community representatives.

Policy Statements - Level 3

The process should be gradual, open and transparent. It should welcome input from interested parties and entertain modification where possible. Stakeholders must feel that not only do they have input but that they are also affecting the process.

Policy Statements - Level 4

A profile of the school(s) to be configured should be undertaken to identify what strengths and weaknesses exist within the present school(s) and what additional positive features will

be provided by the new configuration once it is decided upon. This would entail ensuring that any special needs groups are accommodated within the new structure.

Policy Statements - Level 5

A survey of those directly affected should be carried out with the intention of identifying the strengths as well as the weakness of the present configuration. Such a survey should be done to clearly delineate the types of relationships that exist between the needs of the child and the ability of the system to provide for those needs.

Policy Statements - Level 6

Information meetings should be held to update all stakeholders on the progress, at specific intervals, to alleviate any anxiety that may be produced by the introduction of a new order. These intervals could be divided into stages:

1. Pre-conceptual stage: It is here where the concept of reconfiguration would be introduced. Care should be taken to ensure that the pros and cons of the suggested as well as the alternate configurations are presented. A degree of consensus making should be sought at this point. Where possible fears should be allayed. This stage should be very flexible and non-threatening.

2. Exploration stage: Surveys, focus groups, written submissions, public hearings should be held to hear the concerns, questions and references of those involved. Issues such as transportation, class size, transition points, articulation processes, curriculum layout, counseling services, school design should be discussed. It is important that each concern is addressed constructively.

3. Reporting stage: At this point a meeting should be held to report the result of any findings from the above stage. The report should provide an overview of related literature, curriculum impacts, instructional concerns, cost implications, community impacts and facility changes. Opportunity for modification should still exist.

4. Pre-Decision-making Strategy Stage: Perhaps the most important stage is the implementation of any proposed change. There must be a clearly defined path with further opportunity for modification. This should show all interested parties the how, when, what, where and why once the decision is made. It should also indicate any new expectations of the groups directly affected. Otherwise the change is superficial and the status quo maintained but perceived as new.

5. Decision making stage: The decision once taken should be flexible enough to accommodate peculiarities within a given school or community; however, the alteration of the decision should be based on exceptional circumstances only. By this point

it should be clear, even to the detractors that the change is necessary.

6. Post decision/modification stage: once implemented the decision should be carefully evaluated to ensure that the proposed program is implemented as intended and that any problems with the implementation are expeditiously rectified.

Policy Statements - Level 7

Transition situations should be minimal Wherever possible the transition stages should occur at intervals that are practicable and least threatening. Wherever possible and educationally beneficial the concept of a school within a school should be adopted so as to provide a longer period of time within the same school as well as to provide longer period of attachment to the community.

If transition grades exist then articulation exercises should be instituted in all schools affected. These articulation processes should contain:

1. School visitations by students, teachers and parents to the school to which the student is moving well in advance of that move.
2. If possible, sharing of facilities, teachers, extra and co-curricular activities should take place between the schools.
3. In situations where there are catchment areas, every effort should be taken to ensure that the same feeder schools feed into

the same higher grade school and any overlap with other schools outside the catchment area is minimized.

4. Parental involvement should be encouraged and maintained throughout the student's school life. This is of particular importance during the transition years as it can ease the uncertainty associated with this period. This may be accomplished by having the student and parent sign "contracts of involvement" in the transitionary school.

5. Wherever practicable there should be a regular transfer of teachers between the schools within the catchment areas. This would be predicated on the teacher having the appropriate academic qualifications.

6. Regular meetings should be held between the administrators and teachers of the complementing schools. Such meetings should concentrate on the teaching methodologies employed by each school, an overview of the curriculum expectations, the academic standards within the participating schools, identification of students with special needs, and a sharing of ideas by teachers within the schools. The need to develop overlapping methodologies is important here to minimize any negative impact.

7. Each student entering a new school should be assigned an older student mentor. The focus here would be to make the adjustment easier as well as creates a sense of responsibility in the mentoring student.

8. Special monitoring of the academic progress of each transition student should take place during the transition year. This may involve additional parent meetings, early identification and grouping of those students experiencing difficulties into smaller classes and more individual attention.
9. Additional counseling and guidance services should be provided to students in the transition years.
10. Wherever possible, opportunities for integration of older and younger students should take place. This may be accomplished by instituting house systems in schools, creating across the age groupings sections of some subjects where classes can be integrated.
11. Reduce the number of teacher contacts that students have during the transition year.
12. Develop co-curricular and extra-curricular programs that encourage integration of the age groupings.

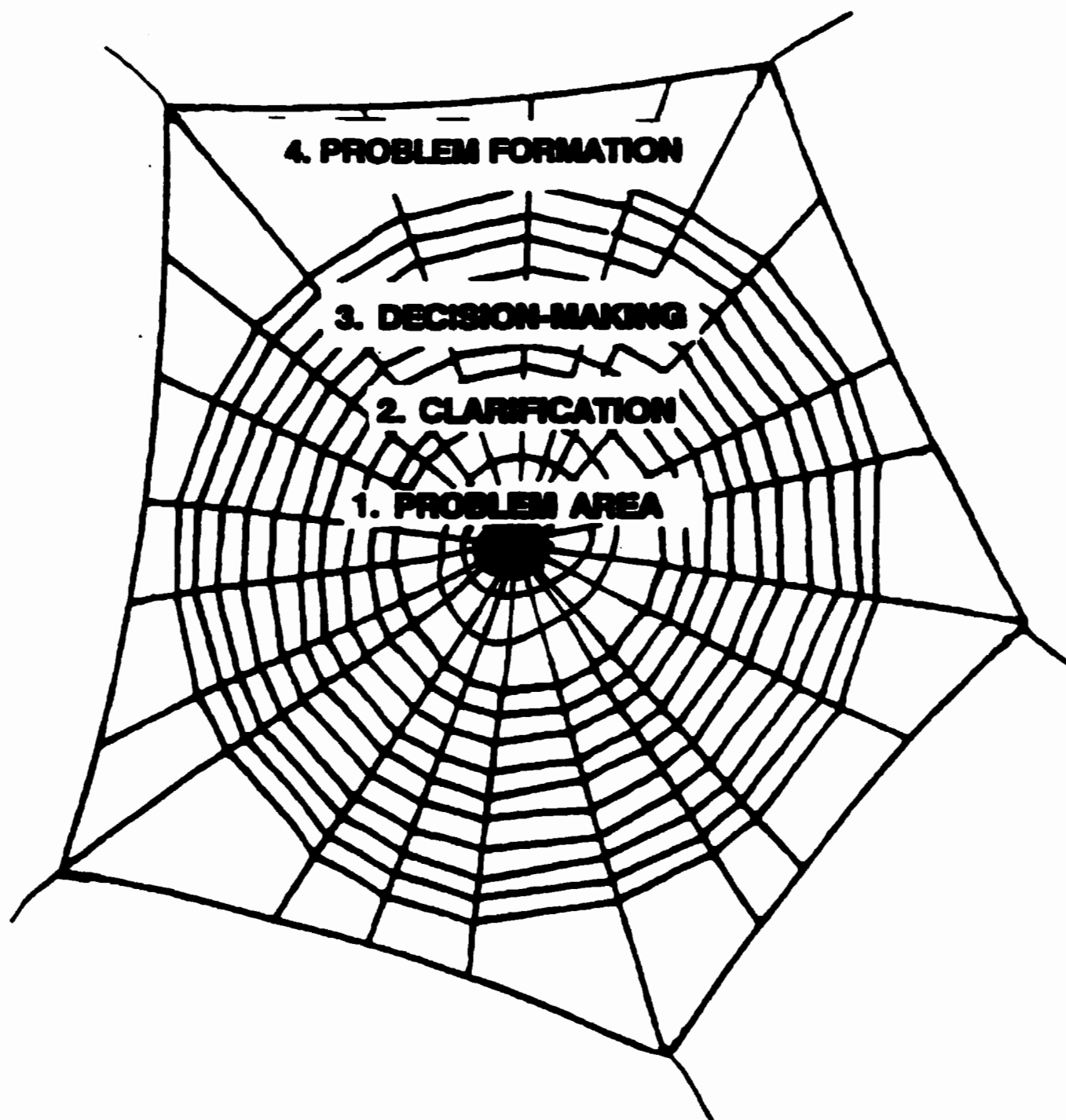


Figure 1. The Realistic Model for Policy Analysis

Source: Brown, J. (1996)

